

BRILL'S COMPANION TO
THE
RECEPTION
OF SENECA
TRAGEDY

*Scholarly, Theatrical and
Literary Receptions*



Edited by
Eric Dodson-Robinson

BRILL

Brill's Companion to the Reception of Senecan Tragedy

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He who controls the past controls the future. He who controls the present controls the past.

GEORGE ORWELL, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

• • •

ἰὼ θεοὶ νεώτεροι, παλαιοὺς νόμους
καθιππάσασθε κάκ χερῶν εἴλεσθέ μου·
ἐγὼ δ' ἄτιμος ἅ τάλαινα βαρύκοτος
ἐν γαῖ τᾶϊδε, φεῦ,
ἰὸν ἰὸν ἀντιπενθή μεθεῖσα καρδίας
σταλαγμὸν χθονὶ
ἄφορον, ἐκ δὲ τοῦ
λειχήν ἄφυλλος ἄτεκνος, ὦ Δίκα Δίκα,
πέδον ἐπισύμενος
βροτοφθόρους κηλίδας ἐν χώραι βαλεῖ.
στενάζω · τί ρέξω;
γελῶμαι · δύσοιστ' ἐν
πολίταις ἔπαθον.
ἰὼ μεγάλατοὶ κόραι δυστυχεῖς
Νυκτὸς ἀτιμοπενθεῖς.¹

AESCHYLUS, *Eumenides*

• • •

ad haec manus exempla poscuntur meae.

SENECA, *Thyestes*

• • •

¹ “The young gods have ridden down tradition and torn it from my grasp! Dishonored, wretched, glutted with rage—Oh!—on this earth, I pour poison from my heart: poison as payback for my pain, a dripping toxin. From it, a defoliating, sterilizing cancer—JUSTICE, JUSTICE!—rushing across the plain will cast murderous blotches on the land. I groan. What now? I’m laughed at. I’ve suffered unbearably in public. Ill-fated daughters of Night, we grieve in disgrace.” All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

Never trust anything that thinks for itself if you can't see where it keeps its brain.

J.K. ROWLING, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*



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Introduction

Eric Dodson-Robinson

Senecan tragedy, in its cosmos-rending violence, prodigious agents driven by *furor*, and weighty language, continues to haunt and move the imaginations not only of playwrights, but also of critics, composers, poets, novelists, scholars, and diverse readers and audiences. The tragedies, though influential throughout the Roman world well beyond Lucius Annaeus Seneca's time, plunge into obscurity following the upheavals of late antiquity and nearly disappear during the Middle Ages. Profound consequences follow from the rediscovery, during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, of a manuscript containing nine plays attributed to Seneca: the renaissance of the tragic genre, at least, stems from it, and (as few appreciate) it is seminal in the birth of humanism. In their receptions of his plays, great writers of the Western tradition revisit, transform, and often rend or eviscerate Senecan precedents. In doing so, they develop competing tragic visions of agency and the human place in the universe that are simultaneously formative, in that they shape present views, and retrospective, in that they vie not only with each other, but with a *preemptive* and tenacious Senecan agency inextricable from their own. In this prelude to the thoroughly interdisciplinary reevaluations of Senecan receptions that follow, I would first suggest how Senecan tragedy can fruitfully complicate reception studies in general, and then briefly account for why the tragedies and their receptions remain vital to broad audiences today.

In the theater of the mind, let us first resurrect the problem of agency from the pit, after the Senecan *exempla*, to speak a prophetic prologue: the agency of the past anticipates the drama that is to follow. We might begin with the notion that reception of Senecan tragedy, or of any work, generally follows a course in which a reader's *Erwartungshorizont* (horizon of expectation), mediated by tradition, complaisantly melds with those of a 'text.'¹ The metaphor of 'horizon,' which implies a romantically aestheticized Nature, should also evoke, for classicists like Hans-Georg Gadamer and those who read classical texts through his theory, Hesiod's creation myth, which associates the red-glowing cut between Sky and Earth as castration scar. An alluring union of

¹ The word *Horizont* can carry not only visual, but also geographic or political connotations: the *europaischen Horizont*.

horizons may conceal a preconceived stratagem, such as Gaia's, for retaking agency. Plato proscribes the myth, as he does all poetry, to banish the example of intergenerational violence and contending values that *Theogony* simultaneously anthropomorphizes and apotheosizes: a dangerous, potentially corrupting precept. Senecan tragedy takes what might seem to be the opposite path. Uranus, who stuffed his children back into the mother's body, and Cronus, the son who mutilated him, become precedents for *aemulatio*, models of intrafamilial violence, incest, and revenge to be outdone by titanic rulers possessed with *furor*. Seneca, in responding to Hesiod, Plato, and a vast Greco-Roman literary tradition, imbues with terrifying power the same animus Plato would expurgate altogether. What is more, he lops off the Hesiodic teleology that culminates in the order of Zeus's rule. Senecan drama makes extended metaphor of such retrospective excisions and dismemberments of tradition, yet also hypostatizes the subterranean agency that may lurk beyond the horizon of our expectations: it is this preemptive agency that I would bring to center stage.

Rereading Charles Martindale's (1993) mantra that the event of actualizing meaning occurs "at the point of reception," we might detect a hint of violent metaphor, as "point" connotes the business end of a weapon. Synchronically, the living may contend fiercely to impose meanings on a seemingly passive text at any moment in history. Diachronically, through interpretation, each generation forges chains of tradition, which, as Jürgen Habermas asserts, reflection may alter (1977, 358). If the victors write and rewrite history, and if, pushed to the extreme, two plus two may equal five,² we might conclude that books have their fates *pro lectione victoris*, according to the reading of the victor. Yet, this is only one side of a complex struggle. Where "meaning is realized," the Senecan tragic tradition epitomizes that "the point of reception" may be "unbated and envenomed": a double-edged foil for which a complex agency inherent in the text contends with those who would impose meaning.

Senecan tragic *exempla* intimate, metadramatically, how violent the contest at the point of reception is conceived to be. In the prologue of *Thyestes*, Furia, a female demon haled from an intertextual underworld, forces the shade of Tantalus from his eternal torment under the earth. She whips, burns, and tortures him until he infects Atreus, his heir, with *furor* to become an artist of *scelus* (atrocities, 234): *ad haec manus exempla poscuntur meae* ("my hands are called to [Tantalus's and Pelops's] examples," 243). Alessandro Schiesaro (2003, 14–16; 28; 31) offers a developed reading of the prologue's metadramatic dimension. To push Schiesaro's reading in the direction of the questions I would raise here, the encounter between Tantalus, in whom tradition inheres,

² Orwell 1949.

and Furia, who embodies the animus for creative reworking, makes sadomasochistic spectacle of appropriating the past. Seneca's metadrama of reception resonates more with scenes from the Marquis de Sade's *Histoire de Juliette* or with the Circe episode of James Joyce's *Ulysses* than with the romantic mingling of horizons we might expect in a Jane Austen novel. Tradition, indivisibly both literary and political, and sometimes presumed to mediate and enable meaning, is precisely what is contested and at stake.

Within the dramatic tradition that stems from and challenges Seneca, the vicious colonizing and anti-colonial struggle between Romans and Goths in William Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*—figured as rape, mutilation, and cannibalism—gives a similarly self-conscious testimony about tradition and reception: meanings and interpretations are imposed by the victors “at the point” of a sword, and they are then crammed into the belly, like Gaia's or Tamora's children. Within the context of *translatio imperii*, the mythic relocation of Rome to England,³ *Titus Andronicus* resonates synchronically with the Elizabethan seizure of Rome's literary and political traditions, much as the prologue to *Thyestes* evokes similar Julio-Claudian appropriations and pretensions to divinity. What is more, Shakespeare's play does so, as I have argued, through ironic engagement with the Senecan tradition.⁴

That reception is agonistic, as Harold Bloom (1999), following Friedrich Nietzsche (2000) in this respect, would have it, brings at least two antagonists to the stage in any reception event. Bloom and his forebears T. S. Eliot (1998) and Nietzsche, give pride of place, though, to the artist's *retrospective* relation to tradition, or to the psychology of the artist confronting tradition, and thus they upstage the *prospective* agency that is at work in “strong misreading” “individual talent,” or forging new metaphors.⁵ Such pre-judgments give precedence to Hamlet contemplating his father in his “mind's eye,” rather than to Thyestes prescribing Aegisthus's destiny; to Andromache at the tomb of Hector, rather than to Hamlet rewriting Claudius's letter. Hans Robert Jauss (1982) recognizes that literary history may have social effects, but his focus on the “experience of the reader” (39) also privileges the backward-looking perspective. Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981) dialogism brings us closer to the reception dynamic I would put forward. However, Bakhtin's (1986) commitment to the

3 See Heather James 1997 for a detailed treatment of Shakespearean *translatio imperii*.

4 Especially through juxtaposing the mythical Golden Age myth, which Tudor propagandists had, like Nero, taken up, with the tyranny of Saturninus's decadent regime. Relevant intertexts include the pseudo-Senecan *Octavia*, Seneca's *Divi Claudii Apocolocyntosis*, Virgil's fourth *Eclogue*, and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

5 Bloom 1999, Eliot 1998, and Nietzsche 2000.

“subject” and “author” (in whatever form) makes his theory unwieldy for theorizing the modular and discrete agency that can activate in reception events.

To be clear, I am not talking about authors or intention, but about a special kind of preemptive agency that manifests in reception. Rather than hack that agency down to a procrustean definition, I hope to share a few glimpses of it in action that should provoke further questions about how it functions. Leaving aside not only the psychology, but the very existence of an author,⁶ a text may exercise an invasive agency. As an analogy drawn from one of the bestselling books of all time, J.K. Rowling’s (2014) *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, consider Tom Riddle’s diary. The diary is a horcrux, or a magical object that preserves part of the soul of its maker. It infiltrates and ultimately possesses the hapless reader and interlocutor, without the input, or even the awareness, of its creator. It is, in some sense, a quasi-animate trap that needs a living reader to activate it. As the reader interacts with the diary, it usurps and possesses her. We might consider the ways that texts, like the horcrux, invite our confidence, sometimes “to betray us in deepest consequence.”

To use another analogy, in this case borrowed from the natural sciences, the light emitted by an exploding star blazes in our sky as portent long after the star itself has ceased to burn. So the agency of texts may endure, though devoid of intention.⁷ What is more, the agency of *ars*, persisting far longer than the lives of its creators, can be preemptive, in the sense that Cronus’s mutilation of Uranus forecloses the possibility of his continued rule or procreation. Similarly, in a metadramatic crime-to-end-all-crimes, Atreus slaughters his brother’s children and deceives the unwary father into gorging himself on their limbs. Like Cronus, both Plato’s Socrates and Seneca’s Atreus strive to preempt response and prescribe the future. Socrates would silence the “lies” (*pseudea*) of Hesiodic violence, while Atreus vows that, though none will approve his butchery, all will recount it. I would draw special attention to the Senecan paradigm, in which *scelus* assumes an infective agency that perpetuates its own memory through others. In the words of Cassius in Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, “How many ages hence / Shall this our lofty scene be acted over, / In states unborn and accents yet unknown!” (3.1.112–14).

The agency that inheres in tradition orients itself prospectively rather than retrospectively, by positioning itself where the future cannot help but encounter it: on its own ground, where the reader or audience must engage with it in terms that reproduce its rhythms and forms and allow it to infiltrate, even

6 Roland Barthes 1968; Michel Foucault 1969.

7 Attacked in the middle of the last century by William Kurtz Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley 1946 and others. See Farrell 2005 for a relevant discussion tied to classics.

to possess. Consider the ‘Atreus doctrine,’ a statement of anticipatory literary agency explicit and succinct enough to serve as motto: *proinde antequam se firmit aut vires parat, / petatur ultro, ne quiescentem petat* (“so before he steels himself or primes his powers, he must be attacked, or he’ll attack me while I rest,” 201–2). The chiasmic alliteration of *proinde*, *parat*, *petatur*, and *petat*, at the beginning and end of each successive verse, could connote excess and symmetry; the sequence suggests threat, preemption, and ineffectual response. Words such as *firmit* contrast with *iners* (impotent), one of the self-reproaches with which Atreus berates himself. The conflation of political and sexual agency animates both Atreus and his brother.⁸ The mention of *scelus*, which the text explicitly ties to fame through a sinister iterability, also intermingles artistic agency, which is what concerns us: *aut perdet aut peribit: in medio est scelus / positum occupanti* (“[Thyestes] will either destroy or be destroyed. Atrocity is set between us, there for the taker,” 203–4). Atrocity, reified as a metaphorical prize in the *agon* of this “brother’s wager” is also an animating force that will self-perpetuate through others.

Atreus, like his forebear Tantalus, does not quite make the grab. Having seen the prologue, we know that Tantalus has been driven to infect the house. His determining agency has infected and overwhelmed Atreus’s.⁹ Yet, while Atreus himself has unknowingly been manipulated, his doctrine and agency persist tenaciously in the tradition that follows.

Shakespeare’s plays—which continue to impact world literature and film on a sweeping scale—offer programmatic and sustained challenges to the Senecan tradition,¹⁰ even when they contend with the Atreus doctrine on its own turf to outdo all atrocity. My work traces Shakespeare’s overturning of Senecan tragic values, which nonetheless animate his drama. *Titus Andronicus*, as an early example, brings characters to the stage to openly vie with Senecan determinism and the Senecan view of human agency. Titus triumphs over Tamora’s family because of his forward-looking anticipation of treacherous tradition, and his active refiguring of *exempla*. When Tamora, Chiron, and Demetrius impersonate Revenge, Rape, and Murder in a ruse designed to preempt Titus into having Lucius dismiss his army of Goths, Titus feigns madness and pretends to be deceived. He then captures Chiron and Demetrius and makes them the ingredients of his atrocious meal. The play-within-a-play intended to deceive Titus and guide his actions alludes to the underworld scenes from Senecan and Senecan-inspired tragedies such as Kyd’s *Spanish Tragedy*. Tamora plays *auteur*

8 See Adams 1990, 159; 212 for sexual nuances of *peto*.

9 Dodson-Robinson 2010.

10 Dodson-Robinson 2013a.

in staging this deception: like Aaron, she is versed in the culture of Rome. In the Senecan drama, the Furies and denizens of the underworld invariably determine the actions to follow in the tragedy, as the Revenge who foretells the “Destinie” of the *Spanish Tragedy* does. Tamora expects to play a similarly prescriptive role. Titus, however, recognizes the Empress and her sons, while Tamora fails to recognize Titus. “For now,” she says,

he firmly takes me for Revenge,
And being credulous in this mad thought
I'll make him send for Lucius his son. (5.2.73–75)

By engaging with the Senecan tradition in this scene, Shakespeare does more than satirize a familiar revenge tragedy motif. He also brings the question of determinism and the relation between self-definition and the other into a self-consciously intertextual domain, where he challenges the determinism that characterizes Senecan revenge. At the same time, the play engages with and asserts independence from the conventions of Senecan-inspired Elizabethan revenge drama such as Kyd's. Shakespeare's model of the relation between self and other is one of improvisatory emulative competition, rather than one of prescribed performance. In Shakespeare's play, Titus's plot outplays Tamora's. Titus responds to Chiron's and Demetrius's allusive literalization of the Philomela story—their rape and mutilation of his daughter—with a literal and allusive revenge, and thus fulfills his promise to them: “worse than Progne I will be revenged” (5.2.194). The tenacity of agency in *Titus* corresponds with the resilience of the self-sovereign subject in the play. In this respect, *Titus* engages with and directly challenges the Senecan and neo-Senecan dramatic tradition.

The agency of Shakespeare's characters—and this is a crucial difference from the Senecan models—transforms political life. In the Senecan plays, it is tyrants like Atreus, controlled by external and infiltrating forces, who triumph. Hamlet and Titus, though they themselves fall, take down the tyrants in order to restore, heal, and redeem the state. In *Titus*, Tamora seizes political sovereignty through violence. In the first scene of the tragedy she tells Titus, “I am incorporate in Rome” (459). Tamora, a foreign agent, has become one flesh with the Emperor, and thus infiltrated the body politic. At the conclusion, Titus excises Tamora with his “knife's sharp point” (5.3.63) and his family dismembers the diseased state. Lucius becomes Emperor of Rome by killing Saturninus in retribution for his murder of Titus. In the first scene of the play, Marcus, speaking metaphorically of the body politic, urges Titus, “help to set a head on headless Rome” (186). Lucius, by murdering Saturninus, takes us back to that opening scene, when all voices called for Titus to be Emperor. In the tragedy's

conclusion, Marcus again speaks in terms of the body politic and implores the Romans to reassemble “these broken limbs into one body” (5.3.71). Lucius now stands in his father’s place, and Aemilius calls him, “Lucius, our emperor—for well I know / The common voice do cry it shall be so” (5.3.138–39).¹¹ Lucius’s first acts as Emperor are to mourn his father, to have Tamora’s remains thrown to “birds and beasts of prey” (5.3.197), which will eat her, and to have Aaron set in the ground and starved of food—an act of poetic vengeance, if not justice, that consigns Aaron—who is a living human being rather than a displaced dweller of the underworld—to play the part of Tantalus in the aftermath of the macabre banquet.

Receptions of Senecan tragedy by canonical writers such as Jean Racine and Shakespeare, as well as a proliferation of modern critical and theatrical interlocutors, have powerfully shaped ‘Western’ ideas about agency and identity. Senecan tragedy is perhaps most relevant to our time, though, because it presages a world in which violence and excess threaten universal catastrophe: psychopath leaders execute genocide on unprecedented scales; wars lead to apocalypse; human evils bring nature itself to ruin. Such is the Senecan tragic vision, and it is fitting that its enormity and horror “give us pause” in our age of global pollution and proliferating weapons of mass destruction.

Throughout Seneca’s drama, *nefas* and *scelus*, which carry dense meanings not suggested by English approximations like “atrocious” or “crime,” lead to assured disaster on a universal scale. The words connote violation of the most fundamental taboos against incest, cannibalism, and the murder of immediate family members. When Thyestes eats his own sons, when Medea murders her children, these are *scelera*. Such violations, in the Senecan tragic universe, contaminate and ultimately destroy nature. Among the pervasive examples of nature ruined by human evil are the contagion, plague, famine, and portents of Seneca’s *Oedipus*; the post-apocalyptic vision of genocide amid the rubble of a city reduced to ash in *Troades*; the cataclysmic storm that destroys fleets of Greek ships in *Agamemnon*; Hercules’s threats to annihilate the cosmos; the mutually-assured destruction that looms above Oedipus’s sons, their vast armies, and the earth itself in *Phoenissae*; the omnipresent overthrow of nature’s laws, particularly in *Thyestes*, *Phoenissae*, and *Medea*. Such eerily prophetic scenes, through indirect and subterranean routes, continue to infuse our apocalyptic visions.¹² In today’s world, perhaps the combination

11 Lucius’s murder of Saturninus also defines Lucius—who rebelled against Titus and was disowned—as Titus’s son, his flesh and blood: “Can the son’s eye behold his father bleed?” (5.3.64), he demands as he stabs Saturninus.

12 Dodson-Robinson 2013b.

of the Senecan conviction in our moral power to affect nature, coupled with Shakespeare's rewritings and his valorization of our agency to rewrite the patterns of the past, will leave enduring legacies.

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PART 1

Antiquity



Imago res mortua est: Senecan Intertextuality

Christopher Trinacty

In Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis*, a Menippean satire about the death and comic “pumpkinification” of the emperor Claudius, the soul of Claudius reaches the gateway of the underworld where “Cerberus lay, or, as Horace says, ‘the hundred-headed beast’” (*ubi iacebat Cerberus vel, ut ait Horatius, ‘belua centiceps’*, *Apo.* 13.3). In this work Seneca employs quotations to parody the action at hand;¹ thus, Claudius himself will be seen as a stand-in for Cerberus with his own beast-like growl (5.3), and the unique term *centiceps* recalls the innumerable innocents that Claudius has ordered to be beheaded (6.2; 10.3; 11.2). Seneca has carefully primed the reader for the employment of this quotation by including language from the quotation elsewhere in the satire.² The situational similarity of the source—*Carm.* 2.13 famously describes Horace's imagined *katabasis*—and its theme of “the power of poetry even in the underworld”³ are appropriate for this moment of the *Apocolocyntosis*. Seneca weaves this quotation into noteworthy intertexts from the *Aeneid* in order to highlight the thematic paradigm at hand:⁴ a figure travels to the underworld to be offered a synopsis of his life's purpose (for Horace, poetry; for Aeneas, Rome's future greatness; for Claudius, his destructive and pernicious reign). Seneca's careful use of quotation in his prose works parallels his careful use of intertexts in his poetry and can help the critic understand Seneca's reception of his sources. This quotation reveals how Seneca finds moments in the works of his predecessors in which (1) the larger context is significant for his own work, (2) the language of the intertext can be developed throughout his work, and (3) the intertext is featured among additional intertextual references.⁵ *Imitatio*, *aemulatio*, and

1 See *Apo.* 1.2: “*non passibus aequis*” (*Aen.* 2.724) and Eden 1984, *ad loc.*

2 See Trinacty 2012. For a similar moment in which the vocabulary of the source quotation influences Seneca's style, see *De Clem.* 1.4.1 and Braund 2009 *ad loc.*

3 Garrison 1991, 277.

4 Seneca's *facile descenditur* (*Apo.* 13.3) recalls Virgil's *facilis descensus Averno* (*Aen.* 6.126) and his *ianuam Ditis* likewise echoes Virgil's *patet atri ianua Ditis* (*Aen.* 6.127).

5 For the theoretical similarity between quotation and intertextuality, see Wortan and Still 1990, 11–12: “In each encounter with a quotation, the reader perceives that, while there is an obvious conflict between sameness or identity and difference, there is also a covert fusion of differences *within* the single textual utterance. We would therefore suggest that every

contaminatio define Seneca's aesthetics of reception and attest to his critical reading of the poetic tradition.

Seneca elucidates his intertextual technique at selected moments in his epistles. In *Epistle* 79, he encourages Lucilius to write about Mount Aetna and to take advantage of the accounts of famous poets such as Ovid and Virgil because the later writer "discovers ready words which, when positioned differently, reveal a new face" (*parata verba invenit, quae aliter instructa novam faciem habent*, 79.6). Seneca recognizes that the poetry of previous generations is now to be considered "public property" (*publica*, 79.6; echoing Horace's *publica materies*, *Ars*, 131) to be mined by subsequent poets in their quest to write their own ambitious literary works (*cupis grande aliquid et par prioribus scribere*, 79.7).⁶ These past masters will necessarily shape one's style and subject-matter, as Seneca elucidates in a subsequent letter: "I wish you to be similar to him like a son, not like an image, for an image is a dead thing" (*similem esse te volo quomodo filium, non quomodo imaginem; imago res mortua est*, *Ep.* 84.8). Here Seneca plays on the death-masks (*imagines*) employed in Roman funeral ceremonies, but emphasizes that such *imitatio*, when done correctly, will lead to a new life of its own ("like a son"). Seneca rebuts the charge that the critic will easily see whose style one is imitating (*cuius imiteris orationem*, 84.8), by insisting that one should combine a variety of sources "in such a way that they coalesce in a unity" (*in unitatem illa competant*, 84.8), as a chorus combines a variety of voices (84.9).⁷ In Seneca's view, such *contaminatio* of material is essential to the creation of literature. One can see this impulse in his prose just as in the tragedies. For instance, the *Epistulae morales* abound with quotations from poetic sources (Virgil and Ovid most frequently) and philosophical writers, primarily Stoic but also Epicurus himself (a philosophical letter-writer in his own right); Cicero's epistolary corpus acts as a large-scale source for emulation, while moments from Horace's *Epistles* also find new life in Seneca's letters.⁸ The tragedies offer a similar *bricolage* of material from

quotation is a metaphor which speaks of that which is absent and which engages the reader in a speculative activity. This speculation centers not on the/a historical source but on the signifying force of a textual segment which, simultaneously within and without the text, can have its origin only in the moment(s) of reading".

6 Note that *publica* appears elsewhere in the *Epistulae* with similar force (*Ep.* 8.8; 21.9; 33.2) and such repetitions may prepare the reader for its use in *Ep.* 79.

7 See Fantham 1978 on Seneca's *imitatio*, McGill 2012, 18–28, *passim* for the distinction between *imitatio* and plagiarism.

8 See Inwood 2007, 142–46 for the importance of Epicurus's letters; Wilcox 2012, 100–3 and 151–56 on Seneca's use of Cicero as a foil, Mazzoli 1970, 157–264 for quotation in Seneca's epistles, and *Ep.* 28.1 and Horace *Ep.* 1.11.25–27. Henderson 2004, 93–118 for *Ep.* 86 as a response to

a variety of sources; through the analysis of these intertexts we can see how Seneca interprets the works of his predecessors within his particular genre.⁹

While quotation and intertextuality can work together in the *Apocolocyntosis*, quotation as such cannot appear in the tragedies (e.g. Theseus will not say “as Horace says”). Nevertheless, the Horatian poem discussed above (*Carm.* 2.13) operates comparably in Seneca’s *Hercules furens*, namely to provide a concise view of the underworld that highlights the importance of poetry. This tragedy features a long description of the underworld, with Cerberus now starring as Hercules’s final labor. Before this, however, the chorus sings an ode (in lesser Asclepiad) dwelling on particular Herculean labors before contrasting Hercules’s conquest of the underworld by force with Orpheus’s conquest of it by song (*quae vinci potuit regia carmine, / haec vinci poterit regia viribus*, 590–1). The chorus sings of Hercules, “Did you dare to look upon the realm of Sicilian Proserpina” (*vidisti Siculae regna Proserpinae?*, *Herc. F.* 549), evoking Horace both metrically and linguistically (*Carm.* 2.13.21–22): “How close I came to seeing the realm of dark Proserpina and the judge Aeacus” (*quam paene furvae regna Proserpinae / et iudicantem vidimus Aeacum*).¹⁰ Seneca reads Horace’s poem as a *katabasis* in which the poet sees his own interests primarily reflected (namely, the immortality of poetry), so here the pairing of Orpheus (the archetypal poet) with Hercules complicates the message of the choral song. Although Orpheus was able to win back Eurydice from Dis and Proserpina (*vincimur . . . evade ad superos*, 582–83), he ultimately loses her because of his inability to suffer delay (*odit verus amor nec patitur moras*, 588). When Hercules appears on-stage in the following scene, Seneca has him boast that he, too, defeated the gods of the underworld (*tristes deos / et fata vici*, 611–12), but his adventure in the underworld will likewise be defined by his rash actions (*non passus ullas natus Alcmena moras*, 773). Seneca problematizes Hercules’s belief that he has defeated death itself by tying his fate to that of Orpheus. After all, neither Eurydice nor Megara (and Hercules’s children) will escape death.¹¹ By creating a connection with *Carm.* 2.13, Seneca evokes and

Horace and 119–38 for the same letter as Seneca’s “‘once-for-all refutation’ of Farmer Virgil’s Truth quotient”.

9 For Seneca as a “man of many genres,” see Ker 2006.

10 While Horace’s poem is in Alcaic meter, both meters share the same form after the caesura/diaeresis. Cf. Fitch 1987, *ad loc.*

11 See Rosenmeyer 1989, 169: “this Baedeker tour through the various stations of the underworld is not an interminable display of misplaced topographical virtuosity but an extended surrogate account of what Hercules is and stands for, and thus, especially in the overcoming of Cerberus, a doublet of the multiple killing that is to follow.”

delimits the value of poetry in this tragic realm. The chorus hopes that such a comparison will ensure Hercules's success, but Seneca undercuts this aspiration with the language and tragic actions that subsequently occur.

1 Philosophical Intertextuality?

Seneca was arguably the most important philosopher and orator of his generation so it is not surprising to find connections with these traditions in his tragedies. In fact, he often plays with the slippage between philosophical, literary, and rhetorical language. Staying with Hercules, one can see how he is a blustering buffoon in the *Apocolocyntosis*, a quasi-Stoic saint in the prose works, but a contradictory figure in the *Hercules furens*.¹² While he may rid the world of tyrants and evil monsters, Seneca's tragedy scrutinizes this heroic *modus operandi* and Hercules's monstrous behavior—Hercules will explain after his murderous rampage: “Titan looks upon Cerberus with a kinder eye than me” (*ipse Titan Cerberum / meliore vultu vidit*, 1333–34).¹³ While aspects of *Hercules furens* touch upon Stoic conceptions of madness, suicide, and cosmology, the play as a whole questions the worth and value of Stoic tenets in the mythological dilemma at hand.¹⁴ Seneca's tragedies evoke his philosophical milieu without offering one “take” on Stoicism. The tragic genre itself ensures such a *heteroglossia* because of the focalized perspectives of the characters as well as tragedy's fusion of a variety of poetic genres (narrative messenger speeches, lyric odes, iambic dialogue). Seneca's reception of the philosophical tradition in his tragedies cannot be divorced from his conception of dramatic poetry.¹⁵ While certain characters or choral songs may espouse Stoic views and parrot Stoic language, Seneca places those views in the larger tragic context, indicating that they comprise just one of many possible outlooks. For instance, Medea's self-commands throughout the *Medea* parallel self-address in Seneca's philosophical works, but ultimately result in a skewed vision of what Stoic *virtus*

12 In the prose works, one can find Hercules included among the number of wise men (*De Cons. Sap.* 2.1), admitted to heaven (*De Tranq. An.* 16.4), and identified with god (*De Benef.* 4.8.1). See Fitch 1987, 40–44.

13 See the exchange between Megara and Lycus about Hercules's *virtus* for Seneca's questioning of Stoic terms (422–38). See Lawall 1983 for more about *virtus* in the play.

14 See Rosenmeyer 1989 for cosmology, Pratt 1983 for a Neo-Stoic interpretation of the tragedies, Bartsch and Wray 2009 for more on Seneca's conception of the self, and Star (this volume).

15 For a recent attempt to find a Stoic theory of tragedy, see Staley 2010.

may be (*Med.* 976–7):¹⁶ “Now come on, my soul: your *virtus* must not be wasted in secret; / Prove to the people the power of your hand. (*Nunc hoc age, anime: non in occulto tibi est / perdenda virtus; approba populo manum*). Within the context of the play, this language of self-command not only helps us to see how Medea develops her heroic self-definition, but also fulfills threats she contemplated with the Nurse earlier in the play. The Nurse had told Medea to keep her anger hidden because “professed hatred loses its chance for revenge” (*professa perdunt odia vindictae locum*, 154) and counseled that “*virtus* is approved when it is in its place” (*tunc est probanda, si locum virtus habet*, 160), to which Medea replied “it is never possible for *virtus* to be out of place” (*numquam potest non esse virtuti locus*, 161). Medea has been contemplating her revenge as a form of *virtus* from early on and her philosophical self-address concludes this move from hidden *virtus* to an action in front of an audience, whether Jason or the reader herself.¹⁷

In his prose works, Seneca will often include a quotation from the Augustan poets and provide a Stoic explication. Lines from the *Aeneid* or the *Metamorphoses* often come to Seneca’s mind as he contemplates virtue (*Ep.* 82 quoting the advice of the Sibyl to Aeneas “Do not yield to evils, but more bravely go wherever your fortune allows” (*Tu ne cede malis, sed contra audentior ito / qua tua te fortuna sinet*, *Aen.* 6.95–96); natural disaster (the flood of *Nat. quaest.* 3 and Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* 1); excessive passion (an adaptation of *Aen.* 8.702–3 at *Dial.* 3.2.35.6); and fortune (an echo of *Aen.* 9.642 at *Dial.* 6.15.1). There are instances in which these quotations additionally appear as intertexts in his tragedies allowing us to see the way in which the change in genre and context influence Seneca’s reception of the source. Seneca quotes Virgil’s “the only safety for the defeated is to hope for no safety” (*una salus victis nullam sperare salutem*, *Aen.* 2.354) in his *Naturales quaestiones* when discussing the various dangers that face humankind. Death lurks at every corner so do not fear earthquakes (the topic of the book)—after all, a drop of water can kill you (*Nat. quaest.* 6.2.5). Seneca introduces the following Virgilian quote with an interesting comment on the epic situation of *Aeneid* 2, “these words were spoken to those people stupefied at their unexpected capture among fires and

16 Cf. Star in this volume, 41–53.

17 The earlier stress on a “place” (*locus*) for *virtus* becomes tied to Medea’s revenge (“A place has opened by which to wound him,” *vulneri patuit locus*, 550; 564). See *Ep.* 92.18.4 for another description of virtue being able to shine “in secret” (*in occulto*). Additional meta-theatrical touches (*approba* in the sense of “applaud”), and metapoetic hints (*manum* figured as the hand of the author—n.b. *auctorem*, 979) show how Seneca blends philosophical with literary overtones.

the forces of the enemy" (*illis subita captivitate inter ignes et hostem stupentibus dictum est* (*Nat. quaest.* 6.2.2). For Aeneas and his men, this line was not a consolation, but rather a call to arms; Seneca changes the valence of the quote to make it indicative of the mindset of the Stoic sage (whose *ratio* dismisses all fears), or of those who can gain solace by reckoning "everything is to be feared, if you want to fear nothing" (*si vultis nihil timere, cogitate omnia esse metuenda*, *Nat. quaest.* 6.2.3).¹⁸ Within his prose works, such quotations are given philosophical interpretations, but the tragedies allow him to break from this perspective and consider the meaning of these passages within their tragic context.¹⁹ It should come as no surprise that this line is on Seneca's mind when writing the *Troades*, about the survivors of Troy's fall. In that play, the ghost of Hector appears to Andromache and tells her to hide their young son, Astyanax, because "this is the only safety" (*haec una est salus*, *Tro.* 453).²⁰ Unfortunately for Andromache and Astyanax, such a means of salvation is feeble when confronted with Ulysses's craftiness and Fate's command, as Andromache expresses when hiding Astyanax in Hector's tomb (*Tro.* 510–12):

fata si miseros iuvant,
habes **salutem**; fata si vitam negant,
habes sepulcrum.²¹

The repetition of *salus* (the only two times it appears in the play) highlights Seneca's interpretation of *Aeneid* 2.354 in his own tale of Troy's survivors. For Andromache's child, deemed the only hope for the Trojans (*spes una Phrygibus*, 462), there will be no safety, no survival, and no tomb for his mangled remains (*Tro.* 1109–1116). Seneca explores the results of the Troy's fall for those not as lucky as Aeneas, namely the captive women who likewise escaped the fire and enemy, but meet with exile and further suffering.²²

18 The Stoic sage should feel no fear (*nescit nec in spem nec in metum vivere*, *Const.* 9.2). See Williams 2012, 226–28 for a reading of this quotation.

19 See Maguinness (1956) and Mazzoli (1970) 97–108, *passim* for more on Seneca's use of citation in his prose works.

20 The ghost of Hector in its own right strongly recalls *Aen.* 2 and intertexts between the two works establish Seneca's dialogue with Virgil at this moment (n.b. *teque his . . . eripe flammis*, *Aen.* 2.289, and *Tro.* 452: *natum eripe*).

21 "If fate helps the wretched, / You have safety; if fate denies you life, / You have a tomb."

22 The consolation and Stoic overtones of *Nat. quaest.* 6.2.2 are only cold comfort for the Trojan women. See Hecuba's final words of the play, "Neither enemy devastation nor fire consumed my limbs: yet how close I stood to Priam" (*non hostis aut ruina, non ignis meos / absumpsit artus: quam prope a Priamo steti*, *Tro.* 1176–7).

Another moment in which Seneca's reception of *Aeneid* 2.354 can be seen is in his *Phoenissae*, a play in which Oedipus details his impiety and his desire for death. Only Antigone holds him back. Oedipus claims that for him to be pious (*pī quoque erimus*, 89), he should kill himself: "the only salvation for one such as Oedipus is not to be alive" (*unica Oedipodae est salus, / non esse saluum*, 89–90). Seneca makes Virgil's words a death-wish. The meaning is not far from that in the *Aeneid*, given that the epic's previous verse reads, "let us die rushing into the midst of weapons" *moriāmur et in media arma ruamus*, 2.353). Yet, Seneca highlights the perverted piety involved in Oedipus's threatened suicide: such a death would be just because Oedipus would be punished for killing his father (90–91). These questions of piety may have led Seneca to appropriate a speech from "pious" Aeneas's own words in order to indicate how such piety is disturbed in the house of Laius.²³ In fact, the only other time in which language from this line is repeated is when Jocasta, confronted by the civil war of her sons, questions her own piety: "I see a son on either side: I can not do anything piously and keep my piety safe" (*utrimque natum video: nil possum pie / pietate salva facere*, 380–81). Seneca envisions the Virgilian line in the mouth of Oedipus and finds that the call-to-arms of pious Aeneas resounds shockingly in the bleak aftermath of Oedipus's blinding and exile. As Martindale writes about the "iterability" of texts, "Every reading of a word becomes a fresh 'instantiation' with its own character . . . the process of recontextualization was already in motion with the text's first receivers, so that there never was an obviously fixed original context."²⁴ Quotations can be given philosophical significance, but, reframed, they can also be made part of Seneca's tragic world and assume significance from that world.

It is impossible to divorce Stoicism from Seneca's tragedies, but the tragedies offer a laboratory in which Seneca can test the reach of his philosophical school. The characters bend Stoic language to their own ends, and the results of their explosive passions often depend on the Stoic understanding of the universe (hence the catalogues, pathetic fallacies, etc.).²⁵ Stoic language is refracted in the tragic genre and these "drama(s) of the word" tease out

23 Oedipus later will revel in the impiety of his sons (*Phoen.* 328–37) and the question of their piety will be important for the second half of the play (409–11, 450–51, 454–57, 535–40, 584–85).

24 Martindale 1993, 16–17.

25 Note Medea's claim that "Fortune always stands below me" (*Fortuna semper omnis infra me stetit*, 520) and the observation of Hine 2000, *ad loc.* about the philosophical timbre of the statement and the way Medea has transformed the tone, "M[edea] claims for her magical powers ape the claims of philosophy".

alternative ramifications for Stoic concepts, whether the difficulties of following nature or the battle between *ratio* and the passions.²⁶

2 Rhetorical Intertextuality

Caligula notoriously said of Seneca's rhetorical style that it was "sand without lime," and Quintilian finds fault with Seneca's *sententiae* and pointed reaction to Cicero's style.²⁷ His tragedies display his rhetorical tendencies: concise phrases, shocking antitheses, hyperbole, alliteration, lengthy *descriptiones* (especially in messenger speeches), apostrophe, and, of course, the *sententiae* that both summarize and crystallize the preceding material. One can find the strong influence of the work of his father, and certain scenes derive from the declamatory tradition, with deliberations that recall *suasoriae* and debates worthy of the disputes that the *controversiae* embrace. It is notable that Seneca the Elder finds intertextuality an important weapon in the declaimer's arsenal and offers varied moments of intertextual success and failure.²⁸ Seneca the Younger interprets and distills the teachings of his father, and one can find particular scenes in which he includes intertexts to his father's work as a way to offer commentary on the action at hand. In the *Agamemnon*, for instance, the ghost of Thyestes offers a tetracolon (a sentence with four parallel clauses) explaining the dramatic situation (34–36):

versa natura est retro:
avo parentem (pro nefas!), patri virum,
natis nepotes miscui, nocti diem.²⁹

26 See Eliot 1950, 54 for his famous description of Senecan tragedy: "the drama is all in the word, and the word has no further reality behind it..."

27 Quintilian also recognizes that the primary problem with Seneca's influence is that the younger generation imitates his faults, not his strengths (*I.O.* 10.1.127–30). Taoka 2011 points out that Quintilian's assessment of Seneca appears to imitate Seneca's own *Ep.* 114!

28 See Fuscus's inclusion of Virgilian lines to impress Maecenas (*Suas.* 3.4–5), an examination of the use of an expression in various declaimers and poets (*Suas.* 2.19–20), and Scaurus's humorous use of a tag from the *Priapeia* to throw off the concentration of a rival declaimer (*Contr.* 1.2.22). See McGill 2012, 147–77 for more on Seneca the Elder's view of plagiarism vs. acceptable borrowing.

29 "Nature has been reversed: / I confused parent with grandparent (o, the crime!), husband with father, / Grandchildren with children, and the day with the night."

Seneca has taken a tetracolon from the declamation of Murredius and made it appropriate to his drama. In that declamation, Murredius describes Flamininus's subservience to a prostitute (*meretrix*): "The forum served the bedroom, the praetor served a prostitute, the prison served the party, and the day served the night" (*serviebat forum cubiculo, praetor meretrici, carcer convivio, dies nocti, Contr. 9.2.27*).³⁰ For the Elder, the final segment of the tetracolon was nonsense, but he offers it as an example of a decadent *sententia*, in order that his sons have examples "both of what to imitate and what to avoid" (*quid imitandum et quid vitandum sit docemur exemplo, Contr. 9.2.27*). Thus, Seneca the Younger has taken a moment from his father's work in which he discusses *imitatio* for his own imitation and finds within the words further significance for his tragedy, as the sun famously withdrew from the sky when Thyestes ate his children. In addition, the subject of this *Controversia* involves the beheading of a prisoner at dinner "by the blow of an axe" (*ictus secures, Contr. 9.2.27*), which foreshadows the action of the *Agamemnon*, as Clytemnestra, armed with an axe, attempts the same action: "His severed head hangs cruelly from a slim shred of skin" (*pendet exigua male / caput amputatum parte, Ag. 901–2*). Both thematic foreshadowing and a desire to improve the original (*aemulatio*) can be seen in this example of the way that Seneca *tragicus* reads the work of his father. While he follows many of his father's strictures on imitation, he finds ways to alter the rules to indicate his own reading of his father's work: to contextualize the *sententia*, *colores*, and maxims of the declaimers in his tragic world.

At another moment we can see the influence of both Cicero and Seneca the Elder on Seneca's depiction of a dramatic debate, namely Creon's proclamation of Medea's exile. Creon's words echo those of Cicero and indicate his desire to expel a threat from the city as a whole (*Med. 269–71*):

egredere, purga regna, letales simul
tecum aufer herbas, libera cives metu,
alia sedens tellure sollicita deos.³¹

30 Both Tarrant 1979, *ad loc.* and Bonner 1949, 160–61 note the parallel. By introducing the intertext with *versa natura est retro*, Seneca further ties this phrase into the play as a whole: cf. *fata se vertunt retro* (758), and the use of *miscui* here anticipates its subsequent appearances (cf. 201, 417, 474, 490, 664).

31 "Leave! Cleanse the realm, and take / Your lethal poisons away with you, free the citizens from fear, / Living in another land, trouble the gods there."

Cicero had deemed Catiline a similar threat in his *First Catilinarian*, and Seneca has Creon ape Ciceronian rhetoric to endorse his position as a speaker of some skill and authority, as well as to indicate that Medea is a threat to the state as a whole.³² Indeed, Cicero's fear that the Catilinarian conspirators would torch Rome is exactly the fate of Corinth because of the potency of Medea's magic.³³ Cicero hopes that Catiline will leave as an exile, just as Creon exiles Medea. Medea, however, will make the most of the day granted to her and not act the role of an exile. In the words of the chorus, "Who would believe her to be an exile?" (*quis credat exulem?* 857).³⁴ Seneca interweaves this language with select highpoints from the declamations recorded by his father in order to point out the declamatory paradigm at work in this scene. As Medea and Creon argue about the length of time she may be allowed to stay in Corinth, their debate hinges on a line from the declamatory tradition (290–92):

CREON. Fraudibus tempus petis.

MEDEA. Quae fraus timeri tempore exiguo potest?

CREON. Nullum ad nocendum tempus angustum est malis.³⁵

Creon's final retort recalls the words of Junius Gallio (*Contr.* 2.3.7): "'Now' he said, 'the time is small': yet there is time for you to accuse me? No time is too small for one word" (*"Iam" inquit "angustum tempus est": et tibi vacat accusare? Nullum tempus uni verbo angustum est*).³⁶ Medea is able to escape her confrontation with Creon with the expected day of mercy, but she will return to this formulation later in the play to indicate how her revenge relied on the time granted to her. As she contemplates killing her second son, she tells Jason, "even if I kill two, nevertheless the number is still too small for my pain" (*ut duos perimam, tamen / nimium est dolori numerus angustus meo*, 1010–11; emphases

32 See *Catil.* 1.10.5–9: *quae cum ita sint, Catilina, perge quo coepisti: egredere aliquando ex urbe; patent portae; proficiscere . . . purga urbem. Magno me metu liberaveris, modo inter me atque te murus intersit.* Cicero repeats this language at *Cat.* 1.20.7–8, adding that Catiline should go into exile (*in exsilium*).

33 See *Med.* 885–7 and *Cat.* 1.9.10.

34 See Hinds 2011, 29–33 for Medea as quintessential tragic exile.

35 "CREON. You seek time for crimes. / MEDEA. What crime is able to be feared in such a small time? / CREON. No time is too small to harm with evils."

36 Apparently this was a well-known speech, as Quintilian quotes a section of it at *I.O.* 9.2.91. It certainly made an impression on Seneca as he recycles this line at *Nat. quaest.* 3. praef. 3: *nullum enim non tam magnis rebus tempus angustum est.*

mine).³⁷ In doing so, she is merely taking advantage of the time Creon gave to her (*tempore accepto utimur*, 1017). The initial intertext with Cicero hints at Roman analogues for this scene,³⁸ and Seneca includes additional declamatory material from his father's work to make this scene a quasi-*Suasoria* in its own right: 'Creon deliberates with Medea over her plea for time.' By having Medea return to this formulation at the conclusion of the play, Seneca contextualizes this speaker's *sententia* in the tragic genre to show what can be done in a short amount of time, namely the day granted to the action of a tragedy (cf. Aristotle *Poetics* 1449^b13).

3 Greek and Roman in Senecan Intertextuality

Although Richard J. Tarrant has underlined that Seneca's primary sources were not the tragedians of the fifth century BCE, one can find examples of sophisticated intertextual echoes between Seneca and Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides.³⁹ Anthony Boyle's commentary to the *Oedipus* indicates how Seneca transforms Sophocles's Oedipus into a more Roman *rex*, while Alex Dressler's reading of Seneca's reception of Sophocles's play teases out the Freudian implications of the Sophoclean version, "when Seneca's characters and readers become conscious of Oedipus' family identity as son and lover, it is as if Sophocles' 'repressed' original has returned, bringing with it the themes of love and family that, compared with Seneca's violent, 'political' version, Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* now represents".⁴⁰ Seneca brings to the fore the fear that plagues Oedipus from the opening of the play (*infanda timeo*, 15), against which he defines his heroic and kingly actions (87–88), and this fear is the fulcrum of the action, according to the chorus's final reading of Oedipus's struggles against Fate (992–94).⁴¹ Additional moments in which Seneca knowingly manipulates the Greek tradition includes his description of the sea-monster in the *Phaedra*, which blends Virgilian, Ovidian, and Horatian

37 A form of *angustus-a-um* appears only at one other point in the play, when the chorus discuss what happened to a previous king who ordered Jason and Medea, Pelias, who "drifting burned among small waves" (*arsit angustas vagus inter undas*, 668).

38 Costa 1973, ad 266 also believes that Seneca's use of *machinatrix* recalls another Ciceronian description of Catiline (*horum omnium scelerum improbissimum machinatorem*, *Cat.* 3.6).

39 Tarrant 1978.

40 Dressler 2012, 513. See Boyle 2011, *lv–lvi*, *passim*.

41 This fear was present in the Sophoclean original, but not with such prominence—see Ahl 2008, 40–42.

intertexts to create a *monstrum* that surpasses Euripides's measly bull from the sea.⁴² His *Electra* at the conclusion of the *Agamemnon* speaks like Sophocles's *Electra*, although now faced with the punishments that the tyrants of declamation favored.⁴³ The Messenger of the *Medea* from whom one may expect a long speech à la Euripides, comes in at a run and seems to be more interested in saving his own tail than reporting events off-stage. Indeed, there is no need to report the destruction of the royal palace since it is a given after the awe-inspiring incantation of the previous act: itself a variation of a Messenger speech.⁴⁴ Seneca merges Euripides's *Troades* and *Hecuba* into one tragedy, his *Troades*, in order to double the tragic effects of the deaths of Astyanax and Polyxena and offer his most metatheatrical comment on viewing such events (*theatri more*, *Tr.* 1125).⁴⁵ The chorus's opening dawn song of the *Hercules furens* derives details from Euripides's *Phaethon*, but updates them with intertexts to Horace, Virgil's *Georgics*, and echoes of Ovid's *Phaethon* episode, as well as specific Roman historical details such as the morning *salutatio* (*Herc. F.* 164–74).⁴⁶ Seneca fastened on Euripides's use of σῶζω in his *Medea* (stressed especially during the first debate of Jason and Medea cf. 476, 515, 531, 534)⁴⁷ and indicates her transformation from a figure of salvation for Jason and the Argonauts to an avenging supernatural force by repeating the Latin term, *servare*.⁴⁸ The final use of this verb in the play has additional metapoetic implications because it invokes Horace's *Ars* and the rhetorical tenets that good poets understand (*Med.* 861: *servat . . . colorem* ~ *Ars* 86: *servare . . . colores*). Seneca supplements the Euripidean material by focusing on the way in which Medea's original role as the savior of Jason and the Argonauts is reversed in the course of the play. Now her destruction is cataclysmic, and she comes to embody the *color* that one would expect from the tragic Medea.

This Horatian intertext stresses a truism: Senecan tragedy acts as a lens through which one can view his reception of the Augustan poets.⁴⁹ Critics such as Alessandro Schiesaro, Michael Putnam, and Stephan Hinds have seen the various ways in which Seneca's reading of this material offers a metapoetic critique of the Augustan poets and highlights Seneca's pessimistic interpretation

42 Staley 2009, 96–120 for more on *monstra* in Senecan tragedy.

43 See Tarrant 1976, *ad* 953ff. and 988ff.

44 See Hine 2000, 175–76.

45 See Littlewood 2004, 240–58.

46 Fitch 1987, 158–63 discusses the integration of Euripidean and Latin poetry in this ode.

47 See 481, 961 and cognates at 14, 360, 482, and 534 as well.

48 See 228, 243, 832, 834, and 861.

49 See Martindale 1993, 35–54 for more on the critic as artist/artist as critic.

of their works in his tragedies.⁵⁰ In the following pages, I explicate selected representative examples of such reception in order to indicate: first, how Seneca's intertextual *aemulatio* incorporates the larger themes/context of the source; second, how Seneca's reception of these poets indicates his reading of the source material; and third, how the *contaminatio* of a variety of sources hints at the rich possibilities for such authorial dialogism.

4 Guilt and Recognition

In the conclusion of the *Phaedra*, Theseus confronts the spectacle of the fragmented body of his son and the suicide of his wife. When Theseus says of Hippolytus's corpse, "I recognize my crime: I killed you" (*crimen agnosco meum: / ego te peremi*; 1249–50) he blends the language of anagnorisis with an intertext evoking Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.⁵¹ In this case, it is the story of Pyramus and Thisbe and the moment that Pyramus has recognized (*repperit*, 4.108) Thisbe's pashmina and resolves to kill himself. Pyramus cries out (*Met.* 4.110–2):

nostra **nocens** anima est. **ego te**, miseranda, **peremi**,
in loca plena metus qui iussi nocte venires
nec prior huc veni.⁵²

Theseus will go on to complain that he is not only guilty once and alone (*neu nocens tantum semel / solusve fierem*, 1250–51), but has sullied his father, Neptune, with his crime.⁵³ Seneca has read the story of Pyramus and Thisbe as a tragedy and encourages the reader to reflect upon the final death tableaux of his *Phaedra* as a dialogue with Ovid's tale. Any consideration of the two passages results in diminished respect for Theseus. Both Pyramus and Theseus apply their deductive reasoning to the evidence given to them and both come to incorrect conclusions about their guilt. However, Pyramus will commit

50 Tarrant 1995; Schiesaro 2003; Putnam 1995, 246–85; Hinds 2011. See Baraz and van den Berg 2013 for an overview of intertextuality in recent scholarship.

51 Peirano 2013 for more on the use of *agnosco* as a marker for intertextuality. Jakobi 1988 89 points out this Ovidian intertext.

52 "My soul is guilty. I killed you, pitiable one, / I who ordered you to come into this fearful place, / But did not arrive before you."

53 In addition, he addresses the remains of Hippolytus's body as *miserande* (1255), echoing the *miseranda* found in the Ovidian passage.

suicide because of his belief that he is culpable for Thisbe's death. Once this intertext is recognized, one may reassess the suicide of Phaedra more sympathetically and appreciate it as similar to the death of Thisbe, who kills herself when seeing the dead body of her lover.⁵⁴ Theseus, who was directly responsible for Hippolytus's grisly demise, concludes the play still alive and with a seemingly limited understanding of his true blameworthiness. Note how his final words place the blame primarily on Phaedra in spite of his assertion that he should "learn from a stepmother" (*disce a noverca*, 1200) what to do. While Pyramus does not come to the correct conclusion and this leads to his tragic suicide, Theseus's recognition may be sullied, and one has to question if he truly understands his role in Hippolytus's death.

5 Medea Reads Horace's *Ars*

While Horace's odes are directly responsible for the form and sentiment of a number of Seneca's choral passages, echoes of Horace's *Ars Poetica* appear in a number of Senecan tragedies. The metapoetic potential for such intertexts is evident, and Seneca's references to Horace's *Ars* indicate expressions of his own poetics. At the opening of the *Medea*, Medea complains about her treatment at the hands of her husband, Jason, and the vengeance she hopes to wreak. The imagery she utilizes ominously equates childbirth with revenge: "already has my vengeance been born: I have given birth" (*parta iam, parta ultio est: peperit*, 25–6). She continues (26–9):

Querelas **verbaque** in cassum **sero?**
non ibo in hostes? manibus excutiam faces
caeloque lucem—spectat hoc nostri **sator**
Sol generis . . .⁵⁵

Medea's language may help us understand one of the most famous (and vexed) passages of Horace's *Ars*. In advising about composition and word choice, Horace claims (46–8):

54 Note how both call to their beloved to listen (*exaudi*, *Met.* 4.144; *Phd.* 1175) place their lover's sword to their breast (*pectus mucrone*, *Met.* 4.162; *mucrone pectus*, *Phd.* 1197), and will follow them in death (*persquar*, *Met.* 4.151; *sequar*, *Phd.* 1180).

55 "Do I sow/weave words and complaints in vain? / Shall I not attack my enemies? I will shake the torches / From their hands and the light from the sky—let the sower / Of our race, the Sun, let him observe this . . ."

in **verbis** etiam tenuis cautusque **serendis**
 dixeris egregie notum si callida verbum
 reddiderit iunctura novum.⁵⁶

Brink points out the possible transposition of the first two lines as well as the “endless debates on the meaning of this [*in verbis . . . serendis*] locution”.⁵⁷ The primary question is whether *sero* here represents the verb meaning “to weave, join” or the verb denoting “to sow, place, set out”. Both Brink and Rudd eventually decide upon the former option, as Brink explains:

I am led to assume therefore that H[orace] has chosen an unusual and more direct way to express the idea of “composition”—not *sermonem sero* but *verba sero*. If this observation is just, certain applications of *sero* “to sow” will have to be jettisoned in consequence . . .

Thus, in this passage, Horace is exhibiting what a *callida iunctura* may look like with his coining of a novel phrase (*verba sero*) that uniquely displays his poetic sensibility. Seneca’s lines, however, would seem to disagree with the conclusions of Brink and Rudd, and his own application of the phrase *verba . . . sero* in his dramatic context points to the idea of “sowing words”. Brink noted that the echo in Seneca was the “only comparable passage known to me,”⁵⁸ but does not appear to have examined the larger Senecan context. As pointed out above, the passage is rife with language denoting pregnancy and birth (obviously the revenge will be through the children of Jason and Medea), and Seneca may be pointing to the proper translation of *verba . . . sero* by glossing the verb in naming the Sun, the “sower” (*sator*) of Medea’s family. Moreover, this verb is used frequently in Seneca as a perfect passive participle standing in for “child” (e.g. *Med.* 231) and this phrase is adapted later in the play (*quid seris fando moras*, 281). In this case Seneca indicates his own reading of the Horatian passage and includes a form of the verb not unlike an etymological pun.⁵⁹ Seneca seems to believe that the idea of “sowing words” fits the Horatian context (and certainly his own), and, because of the metapoetic implications of Seneca’s own

56 “In addition, you will be called cautious and precise / In weaving/sowing words if your clever composition renders / Words too well-known fresh and new.”

57 See Brink 1971, *ad loc.* Rudd 1989 also has an extensive note *ad loc.* At *Ep.* 114.15, Seneca comments on the *iunctura* that some writers currently favor.

58 Brink 1971, *ad loc.*

59 As, for instance, Seneca puns on the etymology of the river Danube (*Hister*) at 585 and 763.

language,⁶⁰ he believes this intertext would authenticate his status as a poet who is *tenuis cautusque* (terms not usually associated with Seneca *tragicus*) and certainly a poet able to give his own spin to *callida iunctura*. After all, he has just done so.

6 Intertextual Excess?

Senecan tragedy, however, consists not only of individual intertextual passages for interpretation, but often places a large number of these intertexts in dialogue with one another. The tragic form is ideal for such internal analysis as the various characters struggle to grasp a consistent and accurate view of the dramatic situation. The chorus is no different in this matrix of voices, but they do often allow Seneca to pan out and put the passions and problems of these protagonists into a larger framework. When the chorus of *Phaedra* sings of the power of erotic love, Seneca infuses their account with poetic and rhetorical intertexts in order to illustrate the wide variety of hermeneutic potential for such references (*Phd.* 351–59):

Amat insani belua ponti
 Lucaeque boves: vindicat omnes
 natura sibi, nihil immune est,
 odiumque perit, cum iussit amor;
 veteres cedunt ignibus irae.
 quid plura canam? vincit saevas
 cura novercas.
 Altrix, profare quid feras; quonam in loco est
 regina? saevis ecquis est flammis modus?⁶¹

The finale of this choral song is one of the densest examples of Senecan intertextuality, with almost every intertext having a larger significance for the play as a whole, whether thematic or metapoetic. Some of these intertexts overlap and intermingle, creating a fitting example of Senecan *contaminatio*, *imitatio*, and *aemulatio*.

60 Cf. Trinacty 2007, 68–69.

61 “The beast of the uncontrollable sea loves, / As do elephants: nature claims all for herself, / Nothing is safe, and hatreds die when love orders; / Old anger yields to love’s flames. / What more can I sing? Affection even defeats savage stepmothers. / Nurse, tell the news you bear; in what state is the queen? / What is the limit of such savage flames?”

For instance, the phrase *nihil immune* originates from a *Controversia* of Seneca the Elder. *Controversia* 10 springs from an (imagined?) civil war event (a man accused of being mad for forcing his daughter to die), and prefigures certain elements of Seneca's *Phaedra*. Suicide, hatred, supposed madness, and troubled familial relationships all are explored in the Elder Seneca's account of the arguments of the declaimers. Cornelius Hispanus makes the argument that the reach of destruction during the civil war affected nearly everyone (*Contr.* 10.3.5):

Nihil in civitate nostra immune a victoris ira praeter feminas fuit: hanc laudem miserae urbi servare licuit. Aut pater noster aut victor insanit.⁶²

What makes the father's actions worse is that he forces his daughter to commit suicide, although women had thus far been exempt from the violence. *Phaedra*'s chorus revives the phrasing *nihil... immune* and changes the context of the *victoris ira*. In fact, when love orders, anger (*irae*) yields to love.⁶³ As we have seen, Seneca echoes his father's work at suggestive moments in his tragedies and the background to this *Controversia* foreshadows *Phaedra*'s upcoming suicide as well as pointing to Theseus's own anger as the cause of his tragic decision (Theseus complains that Neptune was "a lenient approver of my anger" *irae facilis assensor meae*, 1207).

Boyle mentions that the phrase *vindicat omnes natura sibi* recalls Virgil *Ecl.* 10.69: *omnia vincit amor*, "love conquers all".⁶⁴ I believe the full Virgilian line is important for the conclusion of this chorus and is part and parcel with the importance of *Ecl.* 10 for the play as a whole.⁶⁵ The full Virgilian line is *omnia vincit Amor: et nos cedamus Amori* ("Love conquers all: let us, too, yield to love"). In looking at the larger context of the passage, one finds that when love orders, old angers yield (*cedunt*) to passion, and that such *cura* even defeats (*vincit*) stepmothers. Seneca has expanded the thought of the Virgilian line to make it pertain to the context at hand and help increase the identification between *natura* and *amor*.⁶⁶ *Eclogue* 10 is often read as a meeting of genres,

62 "In our state nothing was free from the anger of the victor except the women: it was permitted for our miserable city to keep this praise. Either our father or the victor is mad."

63 Furthermore the insanity of father or victor (*insanit*) can be seen in the "uncontrollable sea" (*insani ponti*, 351) and the adjective is used throughout the play to indicate the wild nature of *Phaedra*'s love (361, 640, 1193).

64 Boyle 1987, *ad loc.*

65 See Littlewood 2004, 282–85.

66 See Boyle 1987, *ad loc.*

pastoral and elegy, with elegy prevailing: "Elegy typically appropriates what it playfully represents as outside its boundaries and here in *Eclogues* 10 *Amor* shows its power to infect and exhaust any landscape."⁶⁷ Will a similar generic confrontation occur in Seneca's tragedy? Perhaps, but another intertext may help to clarify the situation.

Further indicating how the context of the intertextual source matters for Seneca, the idea that "Affection even defeats savage stepmothers" (*vincit saevae / cura novercas*, 356–57) can be seen as a response to Ovid's *Tristia* 2, and, in particular, one of the moments when Ovid muses on the genre of tragedy. For Ovid, it is important that all literature essentially is about love (and, therefore, why is Augustus punishing him and his *Ars Amatoria*?). When he examines tragedy, he writes (*Tr.* 2.381–83):

omne genus scripti gravitate tragoedia vincit:
haec quoque materiam semper amoris habet.
numquid in Hippolyto nisi saevae flamma novercae?⁶⁸

The topic of Seneca's play is the first example Ovid provides and Seneca indicates that he is thinking about the *Tristia* by replicating Ovid's language (*saevae / novercae / vincit*).⁶⁹ While some of this language is traditional,⁷⁰ Seneca is interested in exploring Phaedra's psychology and the power of love to "defeat" the traditional anger of a stepmother.⁷¹ If Ovid reduces the Phaedra/Hippolytus story to nothing other than the "flame of a savage stepmother", the chorus ponders, "what is the limit (*modus*) of such "savage flames?" (*saevis flammis*, 359). That limit is the very tale Seneca is dramatizing. Seneca continues to frame the language from this chorus throughout his tragedy in order to respond to Ovid's depiction of the Phaedra/Hippolytus story in the *Tristia* and to indicate his own tragic poetics. The fire imagery here culminates in both the flames that the monster-from-the-sea sends forth from its eyes (1040) as well as the final funeral pyre for Hippolytus's body (1277).

67 Littlewood 2004, 284.

68 "Tragedy defeats every genre of writing in its heaviness: / But even this genre always has the subject of love. / What else is *Hippolytus* except the flame of a savage stepmother?"

69 Littlewood 2004, 265 also connects Ovid's *materiam* with Seneca's *materia facilis* (*Phd.* 686).

70 See Ingleheart 2010, *ad loc.*

71 Note how earlier Phaedra felt the only way for love (*amor*) to be defeated (*vincatur*, 252) was by suicide. Throughout the play, *vincere* is strongly marked with erotic (esp. 184, 687, 757, 981) and antagonistic overtones (573, 806, 912, 1067).

A final Ovidian touch in this choral ode exposes again how Seneca concerns himself with dramatizing static moments found in Ovid's poetry. The chorus claims that these spectacular changes occur "when love orders" (*cum iussit amor*). While forms of this phrase appear in each of the elegiac poets, the most notable appearance is in Ovid's *Herois* 4 when Phaedra herself writes, "Love ordered me to write what it was shameful to say. / It is not safe to disregard whatever Love orders" (*dicere quae puduit, scribere iussit amor. / quidquid Amor iussit, non est contemnere tutum*, 4.10–11). Ovid's Phaedra likewise endorses the power of Love's commands, even repeating the phrase chiastically to hammer home the elegiac paradigm she endorses.⁷² The fact that Seneca looks back to Phaedra's epistle to Hippolytus reveals his play's concern to portray the letter's primary themes and its characterization of Phaedra. This is only one of many references to *Herois* 4, and that letter should be looked upon as one of Seneca's primary building blocks for his tragedy. Seneca wishes to return Phaedra to her proper genre, and he shows the ramifications for Phaedra's elegiac stance in the course of his tragedy. Seneca's tragedies trump elegy's ability to "infect and exhaust any landscape" by pointing to the tragic genre as a sort of master genre in which the tropes, language, and imagery of other genres are interrogated, critiqued, and reconstructed.

7 Conclusion

Seneca utilizes tragedy to cross-examine the major concerns of his life. His critical reading of traditions such as philosophy, literature, and rhetoric reveals a mind that consistently investigates these subjects from a variety of angles. Tragedy provides distinct voices and generic *variatio*, which affords Seneca the greatest dexterity for such investigations. The poetry of his tragedies is dense with intertextual echoes, and the way these rebound, reflect, and recoil brings to light his distinctive reception of his literary, philosophical, and rhetorical predecessors. Each tragedy operates as a distinctive frame for the intertextual material that permits the reader to observe how Seneca reads and interprets his sources. Seneca shows himself to be intensely concerned with his poetry's ability to establish a dialogue with his precursors and offer metapoetic commentary on the innovative nature of his tragic poetics.

⁷² Cf. Curley 2013, 15 on the larger context of this Ovidian passage—itsself an echo of Euripides's *Hippolytus*, "A potentially fruitful approach is to consider how Ovid recapitulates a key Euripidean theme—a woman's anxiety over her reputation—and adapts it to the seductive aims of the erotic epistle".

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Seneca *Tragicus* and Stoicism

Christopher Star

Four of the great philosophers of the ancient world, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Seneca, each engaged with drama, and tragedy in particular, in unique ways. Plato banned the poets from his ideal city, but offered the challenge that poetry's defenders, who are not poets themselves, but simply lovers of poetry, come to its defense and show that it not only gives pleasure but also befits human beings and society (*Republic* 607d). Plato's most famous student, Aristotle, provides an analysis of tragedy in his *Poetics*; his discussion of comedy is unfortunately lost. Cicero quotes copiously from Roman Republican drama throughout his philosophical works, often to illustrate or critique a point he is making.¹ Only Seneca composed dramas, and thus is in the unique position of being a philosopher and a tragic poet. The question of the relationship between Seneca's tragedy and philosophy has exercised readers' ingenuity for nearly two millennia. In the past few decades, it has become a growing area of study and one that has yielded several, often contradictory, answers. What are the reasons for this lack of scholarly consensus? One answer lies in the fact that there are a variety of avenues for studying Seneca's plays: investigating their relationship with his philosophy is only one option among many. It is up to the reader to decide whether to look primarily at the plays' possible Stoic content, or to choose other paths, such as the plays' engagement with the literary tradition, questions of performance, or the political world in which Seneca lived.² This multivalent quality of Seneca's writing contributes to the wide range of opinions and approaches to his plays. This is not to say that one method or level should necessarily take precedence over another, or will provide the "right" interpretation of Seneca's drama. Rather we should be attuned to how each of these levels of meaning and methods of interpretation can work together and thus bring us to a fuller understanding of the polysemous nature of Senecan tragedy. His plays are often simultaneously involved with problems of literary history and composition, the politics of autocracy, as well as the passions, virtue, and vice.

1 For an overview of the relationship between Roman drama and philosophy from the Republic through Seneca and the post-Senecan *Octavia* and *Hercules Oetaeus*, see Star 2015.

2 See also Ker 2009, 126–29.

If one does choose to read Seneca's plays with an eye to his philosophy, an immediate problem is that Seneca does not explicitly tell us how we might apply a Stoic reading to his plays. When Seneca does discuss drama in his prose, he frequently does so in a simplistic way that cannot be seamlessly applied to the ethical complexities of his tragedies. To take only examples from his *Moral Epistles*, written in the last few years of his life, and almost certainly after he composed the bulk, if not all, of his tragic corpus, Seneca offers three strategies for interpreting drama. He advises us to read drama for philosophical and morally uplifting maxims (*Ep.* 8.8). In another, he notes that we should wait until the end and see how vice is punished (*Ep.* 115.14–15). Seneca also advocates for critical spectatorship (*Ep.* 80.7–8), which involves understanding the Stoic theory of the passions and how our responses to drama and literature fit in. This information is most fully provided in *On Anger*. As we will see, each of these methods opens up further problems, but also possibilities, for understanding the relationship between Seneca's prose and poetry. These problems and possibilities are enhanced by the fact that a given passage, theme or entire play can work on several levels, of which the philosophical is only one.³ The richness of interpretive levels—literary, political and philosophical—should serve as a reminder that, when approaching Senecan philosophy and tragedy, we should not presuppose that Seneca's philosophy is the gateway to understanding his tragedies, and that if we look closely enough at Seneca's philosophy we will gain unequivocally orthodox Stoic answers to the perplexing and horrifying world that his plays present. Indeed, what binds Seneca's two bodies of work together may not be a simple desire to espouse Stoicism, but rather an overarching rhetorical style that is a powerful medium to describe the devastating effects of human passion. Furthermore, Seneca was not blind to the problems of his chosen philosophical school, as he critiques Stoic ideas in his prose works.⁴ This critical impetus may even be more powerful in his plays.

The question of the relationship between Seneca *tragicus* and Seneca *philosophus* is not a new one, but one with a long and complex history.⁵ The poet Martial, a fellow Spaniard who benefitted from Seneca's high position,

3 On the "overdetermined" nature of passages from *Phaedra*, see Croisille 1964, Armisen-Marchetti 1992, on lines 130–35, and Ker 2009, 126–29 for a general discussion of the problem.

4 E.g. *Ben.* 1.4.1, which critiques Chrysippus's work on favors; *Ben.* 3.18.1–4, which critiques Hecto for claiming that slaves cannot perform favors; *Ep.* 33.7–9, against simply repeating what earlier Stoics have said; *Ep.* 88.42–46, against superfluous studies by philosophers; and *Ep.* 113 against overly subtle questions by Stoics on whether "justice, courage, prudence, and the other virtues are living things" (113.1).

5 See Bocciolini Palagi 1987, and Ker 2009, 197–206.

mentions “two Senecas” in one of his epigrams (1.61.7–8). Although he is certainly referring to Seneca the Younger and his father the rhetorician, this statement may have been one of the sources of confusion surrounding the number of Senecas. By late antiquity, the poet Sidonius Apollonarius clearly differentiates between the poet and the philosopher. One “cultivates shaggy-haired Plato and in vain warns his own Nero,” while the other “shakes the orchestra of Euripides” (*colit hispidum Platona / incassumque suum monet Neronem . . . Orchestram quatit / . . . Euripidis*, *Carm.* 9.232–36). This question was not definitively settled until the early modern period, thanks in part to the rediscovery of Tacitus’s *Annales*, which enabled an accurate understanding of Seneca’s biography.⁶

In the centuries after his death, early Christian authors focused on Seneca’s prose works. Tertullian, Lactantius, Jerome, and Augustine all discuss Seneca’s philosophy, albeit with varying degrees of praise.⁷ His tragedies became a focus of intensive study during the late Middle Ages. Although how many Senecas there were remained a vexed question, several commentators discussed the relationship between the plays and the philosophy. The English Dominican, Nicolas Trevet (c.1258–1328), commented on both Seneca’s philosophy and tragedy, and stated that his plays are to be seen as ethical works.⁸ Albertino Mussato (1261–1329), another early commentator on the plays, who also produced a biography of Seneca, notes that according to the ancients, the first philosophers and theologians were poets (60.2). He declares that Seneca’s plays follow this tradition, and writes: “Not spurning this most ancient and noble method, but claiming the laurel trophy for himself, the most wise and merciful Seneca composed this volume of ten tragedies with marvelous talent and most skillful refinement” (*hanc enim igitur vetustissimam nobilissimamque methodum non spernens, sed sibi in trophealem lauream assumens sapientissimus clementissimusque Seneca tragediarum decem volumen hoc miro ingenio et artificiosissima subtilitate composuit. . .*, 105.4).⁹ Others were more explicit about the connections between Seneca’s two bodies of work. In a recently published commentary on *Hercules*, Iohannes de Segarellis (before 1400) explains (14.1–9):

While that man wrote many moral works in prose, he wished to govern his more admirable work with diverse verses, joined by a different law. You will find here that which instructs morals, edifies Catholics, helps

6 Ker 2009, 201–206; 210–12.

7 Ross 1974, 122–131, Ker 2009, 182–85.

8 Mayer 1994, 153–54.

9 Megas 1967, 159.

poets, suits philosophers, informs astrologers and that which teaches everyone who is involved in every type of science and art. His work is delightful to the ears, sympathetic to the heart, and instructive to the intellect.¹⁰

These medieval commentators do not, however, point out the specifically Stoic aspects of Seneca's plays. Rather, their concern is to show the plays' generally edifying nature, and thus justify the reading of pagan mythology by Christians.¹¹ By the late Middle Ages, there developed a tradition that Seneca had converted.¹² For centuries the spurious correspondence with St. Paul that circulated under Seneca's name helped to bolster Seneca's reputation. The praise of his universal learning and upstanding morality present in the medieval commentators may have been colored by belief in his links to the early Church in Rome.¹³

Over a century and a half later, in early modern England, we can see the rise of a new critical attitude. An important event that contributed to Seneca's influence in English was the translation of the ten plays attributed to him and published by Thomas Newton 1581. In his dedicatory epistle, Newton points out the disjunction between Seneca's tragedy and philosophy. He acknowledges that the tragedies appear to glorify ambition, cruelty, inconstancy, and tyranny. Yet he concludes that this cannot be in fact the case because Seneca's writings are the foremost "amonge all the Catalogue of Heathen writers" in using "grauity of Philosophicall sentences" in order to beat "down sinne."¹⁴ As Roland Mayer has demonstrated, it is only during this period, particularly in works of the Neo-Stoic Justus Lipsius (1547–1606) and Martin Delrio (1551–1608), who was critical of this revival, that we can find specifically Stoic, rather than general moral, interpretations of Seneca's plays.¹⁵

Seneca's influence as a poet and philosopher waned considerably during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. His reputation began to grow again in the early twentieth, thanks in part to the republication of Newton's edition

10 *iste dum multa prosayca scripsisset moraliter, voluit excellentius opus per diversos et varia lege ligatos versiculos ordinare. reperies hic, quod morales instruat, catholicos edificet, iuvet poeticos, philosophos deceat, astrologos informet et quod omnes omnium scientiarum et atrium tractatores admoneat. opus hoc est auribus delectabile, compassibile cordi et intellectui magistrale.* Hafemann 2003, 14.

11 Mayer 1994, 153–56.

12 Ross 1974, 123.

13 Yet there were medieval authors who attacked Seneca's philosophy, see Ross 1974, 137–40, and Ker 2009, 185–86.

14 Newton 1966, 3–6.

15 Mayer 1994, 157–74.

of translations in 1927, and to T. S. Eliot's essays on Seneca, one of which formed the preface to Newton.¹⁶ By mid-century the strong links between Seneca's tragedy and philosophy were again affirmed in an essay by Berthe Marti.¹⁷ She argues that the plays are pieces of Stoic propaganda and should be read in the order preserved by the oldest and most authoritative manuscript, the *Etruscus* (E), which begins with *Hercules* and ends with *Hercules Oetaeus*. She sees the order of the plays as an allegory for the Stoic *proficiens*'s struggles through suffering, violence and passion. The Stoic life ideally ends with an apotheosis as is granted to Hercules in the final play. This argument has not gained acceptance and is based on several problematic assumptions, not the least of which is that most scholars doubt that *Hercules Oetaeus* was by Seneca. In fact, this essay represents something of the swansong of reading Seneca's plays as unproblematically Stoic.¹⁸ Indeed, a few decades later, Joachim Dingel published a brief book, which brings back a revised version of the two Senecas.¹⁹ While he believes that one man wrote both the prose and the dramatic texts, he argues that Seneca the philosopher would have ultimately disavowed his poetic output. Following the line of thought that Stoicism may not provide the best lens with which to read Seneca's plays, more recently, scholars have argued that Seneca was more influenced by Platonic or Aristotelian poetics.²⁰ While we will look at Seneca's plays under a Stoic lens in this chapter, we must remember that specifically Stoic interpretations of the play began relatively recently.²¹ Furthermore, as Harry Hine points out, since we can never know Seneca's intentions for writing his plays, the best that can be achieved is what he refers to as a "Stoic diagnosis" of the plays. Even such a reading still has to account for the fact that Seneca may be treating general ethical commonplaces in his plays, rather than specifically Stoic points.²²

With these caveats in mind, this chapter will argue that Seneca's plays are critically engaged with Stoicism. The plays question and challenge Stoic tenets about drama and the emotions, but they do not abandon the world of Seneca's prose works. They are part of the overall dramatic nature of Senecan rhetoric and thought. This is not to say that the question we will treat in this

16 Eliot 1932, 51–88; 107–120.

17 Marti 1945.

18 Although see the comments of Pratt 1983, 128–131.

19 Dingel 1974.

20 For an analysis of Senecan tragedy, and *Thyestes*, in particular that looks to Plato (and Freud), see Schiesaro 2003; for Seneca and Aristotelian poetics, see Staley 2010.

21 Mayer 1994.

22 Hine 2004.

chapter is essential to approaching Seneca. As we have already noted, one can fruitfully treat the plays and philosophy separately.²³ Nevertheless, there is a strong trend in current scholarship which argues that in order to understand fully the complexity and richness of Seneca's thought, one must come to grips with the entirety of his corpus.²⁴ There are difficulties—some might say fatal ones—in trying to link up Seneca's two main bodies of work. When tackling all of the corpus, the immense breadth of Seneca's writing must be remembered. The standard dichotomy between Seneca the philosopher and Seneca the tragedian is too simple. He was also a satirist (*Apocolocyntosis*), a famous orator, who thus aroused the wrath of Caligula and became the first imperial speech-writer under Nero, as well as a biographer, as represented by the lost *vita* of his father.²⁵ The designation "philosopher" also deserves further qualification. Not only did he write works primarily concerned with ethics, moral progress, and psychology (*Dialogues*, *Moral Epistles*), but also political philosophy (*On Mercy*), natural philosophy (*Natural Questions*), and social philosophy (*On Benefits*). Thus, the question must be asked, what aspect of Seneca's vast philosophical output are we attempting to link up with his drama?²⁶ There is an inherent paradox in reading Seneca. On the one hand, we must acknowledge the breadth and complexity of his *corpus*. At the same time, individual approaches to Seneca, especially chapter or article-length pieces, must limit

23 Seneca the philosopher, e.g. Hadot 1995, Foucault 1986, Sorabji 2000, Inwood 2005; performance aspects of Senecan drama, Harrison 2000, Kohn 2013.

24 Rosenmeyer 1989, Nussbaum 1994, Volk and Williams 2006, Bartsch 2006, Bartsch and Wray 2009, Ker 2009, Staley 2010, Star 2012.

25 Given Seneca's wide-ranging literary corpus, perhaps we should view him less as a philosopher and/or tragedian and think of him more as a man with great literary ambitions, who sought to leave his mark on a wide range of genres. Tragedy and philosophy were only two. See Ker 2006, and Inwood 2007, xviii.

26 Yet another difficulty concerns the dating of the individual works in the Senecan corpus. Many of his prose works can be dated with relative certainty. This is not the case with his plays. Scholars generally accept that they fall into three periods: early (*Agamemnon*, *Phaedra*, and *Oedipus*), middle (*Troades*, *Medea*, and *Hercules*), and late (*Thyestes* and *Phoenissae*). The early plays may have been written during Seneca's exile (41–49 CE), and the middle plays during his early years back in court. Due to the fact that Hercules's poetic speech in the *Apocolocyntosis* (7.2) seems to reference lines from the play *Hercules*, this play, and the others in the middle group may have been written before Claudius's death in October of 54 CE. The last two plays may date from 60 CE or after. For a recent overview of questions concerning the dates of all of Seneca's works, see Marshall 2014, 33–44.

their focus. In this chapter, we will consider how Seneca's plays relate to passages from *On Anger*, *On Mercy*, and the *Epistles*.²⁷

What does Seneca say about tragedy and drama in his philosophical works? The immediate answer is very little. Seneca never mentions his own plays, and unlike Plato and Aristotle, Seneca did not write at length on the relationship between drama and philosophy. Seneca quotes from drama less than Cicero does in his philosophical works. Other Stoic philosophers, notably Chrysippus before, and Epictetus after him, were more explicit in their discussions of the relationship between the two.²⁸ The *Epistles* contain Seneca's most detailed accounts of drama, and offer suggestions for how to engage with it philosophically. These methods do not, however, offer unproblematic solutions for how to do the same with Seneca's own plays. One method involves excerpting plays for pieces of philosophical wisdom. In *Epistle* 8, Seneca exclaims, "How many poets say things which have been said by philosophers or should be said!" (*quam multi poetae dicunt quae philosophis aut dicta sunt aut dicenda*, 8.8). Yet, he explicitly skips over mining tragedy or Roman historical drama for examples (*non attingam tragicos nec togatas nostras*, 8.8). Instead he declares that philosophical ideas even can be found in mimes. He singles out the first century BC Syrian mimographer Publilius Syrus as being particularly worthy of quotation and cites a line that succinctly illustrates the theme of this letter: "Everything that comes about by desiring belongs to another [i.e. Fortune]" (*alienum est omne quidquid optando evenit*, 8.9).²⁹ He then quotes two lines by the addressee of his letters, Lucilius Iunior. It remains unclear whether these lines were taken from a play written by Lucilius, a larger collection of verse maxims by him, or simply are Lucilius's poetic response to Publilius's *sententia*. Regardless of their ultimate source, Seneca claims that Lucilius was able to state the philosophical point even better, "it is not yours what Fortune has made yours" and "the good that can be given can be removed" (*non est tuum fortuna quod fecit tuum. dari bonum quod potuit auferri potest*, 8.10).

Quotable philosophical *sententiae* can be found throughout Seneca's plays. Yet when the context and speaker are considered, their philosophical value

27 There have also been studies that link his plays to the cosmological outlook of the *Natural Questions*, notably Rosenmeyer 1989, see also Berno 2003, 171–74. Davis (2003, 69–74) argues that *Thyestes* is Seneca's post-retirement from politics response to *On Mercy*.

28 For an overview of Stoic views toward poetry, see Nussbaum 1993.

29 Eventually, Seneca's philosophy would also be mined for quotable moral maxims and collected in *florilegia*. "Since these were used in elementary education, they help to account for Seneca being so widely known even among non-philosophers in the later Middle Ages and Renaissance" (Ross 1974, 137).

comes into question. For example, Medea twice notes her superiority to circumstances, "Fortune fears the brave, but oppresses the weak; Fortune can take away my possessions, but not my soul" (*fortuna fortes metuit, ignavos premit*, 159; *fortuna opes auferre, non animum potest*, 176). The second line develops the idea found in Publilius's and Lucilius's *sententiae* in *Epistle* 8. Medea's first line has an even longer history. In *Epistle* 94, Seneca again approvingly quotes a *sententia* from Publilius: "Fortune favors the bold, the weak hinder themselves" (*audentis fortuna iuvat, piger ipse sibi opstat*, *Ep.* 94.28). Taken on their own, Medea's lines seem worthy of the philosophical canonization that Seneca grants to Publilius and Lucilius in his letters. Yet when we consider the context, we see that Medea is declaring her invulnerability to Fortune while stirring up her passions and planning her violent revenge. The lines' philosophical currency is corrupted. There are other possibilities, however, that do not involve privileging the philosophical nature of Medea's words. Medea's claim that "Fortune favors the bold" has a long history that stretches beyond Publilius. It is first attested in Latin in Terence's *Phormio* (203), Ennius's *Annales* (254 Warmington), and most famously in Virgil's *Aeneid* (10.284). Thus we can see how questions of literary history complicate further the possible philosophical nature of Medea's words. Perhaps Seneca uses Medea's lines simply to insert his play into an already long tradition of citation and allusion.³⁰

If we press the philosophical side harder, unavoidable and intriguing questions arise. Is Seneca commenting on the philosophical practice of excerpting literature for bits of wisdom, which, as we have seen, he enthusiastically endorses? As Medea demonstrates, the utility of the practice is compromised by careful readers who take the time to consider the source and context. Seneca's Medea demonstrates that famous taglines and philosophical maxims can be put to use in the pursuit of vice rather than virtue. Although paradoxically, Medea does claim that she is acting in accordance with virtue at the start of the play (161), and at the end of the play, when she kills her second child in full view of Jason and the Corinthians (977). In short, the excerpting method cannot be applied to Seneca's plays as simply as his philosophy would lead us to believe. It only leads to more questions, both of literary history and

30 Here as well, questions of biography and political context arise. Seneca has long been seen as a hypocrite, particularly for preaching Stoic austerity and detachment while becoming fabulously wealthy as a central member of Nero's court. See the attack of Suillius in Tacitus (*Ann.* 13.42.4). Petronius's citation of "Publilius's" poem against luxury in the middle of his decadent feast may also be a jab at Seneca's fondness for quoting the mimographer's *sententiae*, while not himself living up to them. See Panayotakis 2009, 60–61.

philosophical utility. Medea challenges the philosophical method for reading plays presented in the *Epistles*. In fact, Medea's critique goes to the heart of Seneca's philosophy, as she demonstrates the ambiguity of Stoic maxims and of *virtus*.³¹

One of Seneca's lengthiest discussions of tragedy concerns Greek tragedy. In letter 115, Seneca states that these plays show the corrupting power of wealth and then translates seven lines from unknown Greek plays as examples (115.14 = Trag. Graec. fr. adesp. 181.1 and 461 Nauck²).³² He quotes a five-line passage from a lost play by Euripides, in which money is praised as a great good for the human race (*pecunia, ingens generis humani bonum*, 115.14 = Eur. *Danae* fr. 324 Nauck²). He then states that when these lines were spoken, the Athenians rose up in order to throw both Euripides and his play out of the theater. Euripides had to quiet the audience and ask them to wait until the end when they would see avarice duly punished (115.15). This method of waiting until the end to have justice served also does not neatly apply to Seneca's plays. In fact, the conclusions of Seneca's plays are shockingly dark and frequently highlight the despair, suffering, and impotence of the victims. Medea displays her vengeful *virtus* and flies off triumphantly in the chariot of the Sun. The play's final two lines contain Jason's enigmatic declaration that where Medea flies there are no gods (1026–27). *Thyestes* ends with a mockery of the idea that justice should be served at the end of a play. Thyestes calls on the Furies to punish his brother (*puniendum... te*, 1111), to which Atreus cleverly replies, "I hand you over to your children to be punished" (*te puniendum liberis trado tuis*, 1112). In *Hercules*, Theseus describes the punishment that awaits tyrants in the underworld (735–747). While the afterlife may set things right, the punishment of tyrants in this world is considerably more problematic. Hercules's madness comes upon him after he kills Lycus. He murders his own children while believing that he is extirpating the tyrant's line (987–91).³³

The absence of the controlling hand of Stoic providence to guide Seneca's plays has been taken to be the prime example of their anti-Stoic character.³⁴

31 As Littlewood (2004, 16) notes, "... the tragic Fury talks like a Stoic *sapiens*... [c]haracteristic Stoic postures and *sententiae* cannot be taken as secure marks of virtue." For more on Medea's use of Stoic methods of self-shaping and self-control, in particular the *meditatio*, see Bartsch 2006, 255–81, and Star 2012, 76–83.

32 For other passages where Seneca decries the negative influence of poetry, see *Brev.* 16.5, *VB* 26.6, *Ben.* 1.4.5–6, and the comments of Williams 2003, 226.

33 Further problems arise when we consider the parody of punishment of tyrants in the underworld contained in the *Apocolocyntosis* (14–15).

34 Dingel 1974, 99, Curley 1986, 168–184; Motto and Clark 1988, 43–65 give an overview of the question. For a re-evaluation of the argument that the apparent lack of divine providence

Yet divine providence does not necessitate the absence of human evil or even the eventual victory of virtue over vice. Furthermore, as Cedric Littlewood has suggested, “the absence of a controlling order in the world speaks in particular to the concerns of Seneca’s isolationist brand of Stoicism which urges disengagement and withdrawal from and irredeemably corrupt world.”³⁵ For a Stoic, as Medea paradoxically recognizes, all that matters is one’s virtue. Virtue is the only good; vice is the only evil, and everything else is an “indifferent.” The latter category comprises two types: preferred indifferents, such as family and good health, and dispreferred, such as the loss of a loved one and ill-health. Neither should impinge on our abilities to extirpate the passions, pursue virtue, and live the good life.³⁶

As Seneca realized, living under an autocrat would offer unique challenges to these Stoic ideals. He quotes with approval the maxim of one courtier who achieved the rare distinction of reaching old age while in the service of kings, “accept insult and say thank you” (*iniurias . . . accipiendo et gratias agendo*, *On Anger* 2.33.2).³⁷ Seneca does, however, at times have difficulties when the demands of Stoicism butt up against the unbounded potential for cruelty given to despots.³⁸ When setting out to prove that anger can be suppressed even in the face of sadistic tyrants, Seneca questions briefly the appropriateness of certain fathers’ calm reactions to witnessing the murder of their children. The problem of infanticide, so central to his tragedies, also has a prime place in his philosophy of emotional restraint. In *On Anger*, Seneca tells the story of how the Persian king Cambyses shot an arrow through the breast of the son of Praexaspes, one of his courtiers, in order to show that heavy drinking did not affect him. When Cambyses asked if his hand was steady enough, the father replied that Apollo could not have aimed better (3.14.2). Seneca’s immediate response is not to congratulate the father for suppressing his anger, but rather to curse him for acting like a slave (3.14.3), and to claim that praising the shot was a greater crime than shooting it (3.14.4). Seneca suggests two options for how Praexaspes should have reacted. He should have either rationally debated

automatically renders Seneca’s plays anti- or unstoic, see Littlewood 2004, 15–102, and Fischer 2008.

35 Littlewood 2004, 16.

36 Graver 2007, 48–51; the key passages on indifferents are collected in Long and Sedley 1987, 58 A–K.

37 The biographical tradition here is significant. According to Tacitus, after Nero refused to let Seneca retire from court in 62 CE, Seneca thanked the emperor for his refusal (*Ann.* 14.56.3). On the links between *On Anger* and Tacitus’s account, see O’Gorman 2000, 153–54, Ker 2009, 71, and Star 2012, 206–7.

38 See also the discussion of Nussbaum 1994, 432–38.

with the king on the true nature of glory, or ordered that the king aim his next shot at him (3.14.3). Yet, overall, Seneca seems to realize that this example offers more problems than solutions and concludes by blandly noting that he has proved his point that anger can be suppressed even when witnessing the murder of one's child (3.14.4).

His next example moves even closer to the world of his tragedies, specifically the cannibal feast that concludes *Thyestes*. In *On Anger*, Seneca also tells the story of Harpagus, who was forced to eat his children for giving his king advice. When he was repeatedly asked how he liked the meal, Harpagus replied, "Every meal is delightful with a king" (*apud regem omnis cena iucunda est*, 3.15.1). Here Seneca at least admits that his flattery spared Harpagus from eating the leftovers and notes, "I am not forbidding the man from condemning the king for his deed, and I am not forbidding him from seeking a fitting punishment for such a savage monstrosity" (*non veto patrem damnare regis sui factum, non veto quaerere dignam tam truci portento poenam*, 3.15.2). Nevertheless, Seneca does not specifically say how one might punish such a king. His advice is to direct aggressive impulses at the self and to use suicide as the way out of an unbearable situation (3.15.3–4). Here we see clearly the ascetic demands of living a Stoic life, in which flattery and suicide are more admirable than the violent, but ultimately impotent, curses and lamentation uttered by Thyestes or Jason in Seneca's plays when their children are slaughtered. Following Seneca's brand of Stoicism is a choice, one that few would be willing to make, and one with which Seneca himself struggles.³⁹ As both Seneca's philosophy and tragedy make clear, Stoic providence will not prevent or punish tyrants. All that is in our power is our emotional reactions to the outrages they may force us to endure. While many of the victims in his plays do not respond stoically to their familial tragedies, even when people do so in Seneca's philosophy, their responses are not unambiguously presented or praised.⁴⁰

We have already seen how, in contrast to Seneca's discussions of drama in his philosophy, his plays do not offer easy answers via moral *sententiae* or present virtue rewarded and vice punished. We will now consider the question of the plays' relationship to Seneca's theory of the passions. Here we turn again to *On Anger*. This dialogue presents, in quick succession, an analysis of a line from Republican tragedy and then Seneca's three-step theory of the origins of

39 Nussbaum 1994, 434.

40 An exception to this rule of unstoic responses to tragedy may be Astyanax's and Polyxena's deaths, as Littlewood points out (2004, 16), but even these are not without ambiguities. For example, Polyxena falls dead upon Achilles's tomb "with an angry impulse" (*irato impetu*, 1159).

the passions, which includes a brief, but important, point about the relationship between drama and the emotional response of the audience. At the end of book one, Seneca discusses the falsely great and impressive words of Atreus from Accius's play of the same name, "Let them hate, provided that they fear" (*oderint dum metuant*). Despite his vehement denunciation of this line, Seneca could not resist repeating it again; it comes up for discussion twice in *On Mercy*, and is referenced in his plays.⁴¹ The literary, biographical, political, and philosophical reasons for this repeated engagement overlap. In his plays, Seneca can use this line to allude to and one up his literary predecessor. As scholars have pointed out, the epigram that Seneca's Atreus uses to summarize his relationship to his subjects, "Let them want what they do not want" (*quod nolunt velint*, 212), surpasses that of his Republican ancestor.⁴² Seneca's Atreus does not simply want his people to fear him. He wants to control their feelings so completely that he has the power to force them to desire what should repulse them. On the biographical and political side, the significance of this line for Seneca also runs deep. According to Suetonius, Caligula, the man who almost had Seneca executed and whose assassination Seneca celebrates at the end of the first book of *On Anger* (1.20.8–9), adopted Accius's words as his political motto (*Cal.* 30.1). In *On Mercy*, Seneca attempts to steer Nero away from adopting a similar course by twice condemning Atreus's, and now Caligula's, words (1.12.4, 2.2.3). Yet it is not only those with imperial power who are attracted to this line. As Seneca notes in *On Anger*, this line is dangerous because it is widely admired and considered to represent the statement of an impressive figure, who is worthy of imitation.

Seneca concludes book one of *On Anger* by attacking the notion that anger contributes to "greatness of soul" (*magnitudo animi*). His interlocutor is not persuaded by the first points of the argument, however, and asks, "What then? Do not some utterances spoken by angry people seem to have been sent forth from a great soul?" (*quid ergo? non aliquae voces ab iratis emittuntur quae magno emissae videantur animo?*, 1.20.4). In order to contradict this point, Seneca writes (1.20.4–5):

"On the contrary, such words come from those ignorant of true greatness, like that terrible and abominable 'let them hate, provided that they fear.' You can tell that it was written during the age of Sulla. I don't know which is a worse thing to wish for—to be hated or to be feared. 'Let them hate.' It occurred to him that he would be accursed, ambushed and oppressed:

41 *Medea* 168, *Phoe.* 654, *Thy.* 212.

42 Mader 1998, 36–38, Schiesaro 2003, 161.

what did he add? May the gods damn him because he discovered such a remedy for hatred. 'Let them hate'—what? 'Provided that they obey'? No. 'Provided that they approve'? No. What then? 'Provided that they fear.' In this way I would not wish even to be loved. Do you think that this was said with a great spirit? You will be wrong, if you do. This is not greatness but savageness. There is no reason for you to trust the words of the angry, their noise is great and threatening, but within their mind is most afraid."⁴³

Here we see Seneca attacking the popular (and Aristotelian) notion that anger contributes to greatness. His reply to the interlocutor's question and analysis of the famous line from Accius's *Atreus* suggest that Seneca believes that tragedy is in part responsible for promulgating this false belief. Cicero's discussion of this line in *On Duties* lends support. Cicero notes that when Atreus makes terrible statements such as, "let them hate, provided that they fear," or, "the father himself is a tomb for his children," the audience breaks out into applause (*oderint dum metuant; aut natis sepulcro ipse est parens*, *On Duties* 1.97). Whereas Cicero simply notes that Accius is properly commended for writing lines so fitting to Atreus's character, Seneca goes much deeper into the problem. He notes that Atreus's words are not simply the product of the playwright's mind, but also a product of the political climate in which the play was written—albeit wrongly, as Accius died around 85 BCE, several years before the full horrors of the age of Sulla. Seneca moves rapidly from politics to psychology and engages dialogically with this line in an attempt to lay bare the falseness of its claim and rationale. The rapid repetition of the first word along with Seneca's offering of other options reminds us of his plays' virtuosic moments in which his passion-fueled characters debate with the voice of reason.⁴⁴ An important parallel to *On Anger's* critique of Accius occurs in *Medea*. Medea's exchange with her Nurse (*nutrix*) alludes to Atreus's line, only to have it, as well as everything else the *nutrix* says, trumped by Medea (168–71):

43 <Immo> veram ignorantibus magnitudinem, qualis illa dira et abominanda 'oderint, dum metuant.' Sullano scias saeculo scriptam. nescio utrum sibi peius optaverit ut odio esset an ut timori. 'oderint.' occurrit illi futurum ut execrentur insidientur opprimant: quid adiecit? di illi male faciant, adeo repperit dignum odio remendium. 'oderint'—quid? 'dum pareant'? non. 'dum probent'? non. quid ergo? 'dum timeant'. sic ne amari quidem vellem. magno hoc dictum spiritu putas? falleris; nec enim magnitudo ista est sed immanitas. non est quod credas irascentium verbis, quorum strepitus magni, minaces sunt, intra mens pavidissima.

44 The voice of reason is invariably defeated, as Herington (1966, 449) notes in his three-fold division of the major movements of Senecan tragedy: "The Cloud of Evil (this coincides with a formal division, the Prologue), the Defeat of Reason by Passion; finally, The Explosion of Evil, consequence of that defeat."

NUT. A king is to be feared. ME. My father was a king.

NUT. You don't fear weapons? ME. Not even if they were born from the earth.

NUT. You will die. ME. I want to. NUT. Flee. ME. I regret fleeing.

NUT. Medea—ME. I shall become. NUT. You are a mother. ME. You see to whom.⁴⁵

Here we see important stylistic and rhetorical links between Senecan philosophy and tragedy. Both *On Anger* and *Medea* contain rapid-fire battles for control of the soul which take as their starting point Accius's maxim. There are, however, two very different results. Seneca's philosophy will hopefully steer people away from embracing anger and revenge. Yet, in his plays, the passions are victorious. How can we account for this? On the one hand, the mythological stories with which Seneca is working necessitate this victory. Why, then, do Seneca's plays focus so relentlessly on the emotions that his plays seem like mirror images of his philosophy? One reason for the victory of the passions may be that the voice of reason is frequently placed in the mouth of a subservient interlocutor, as in the *Medea* passage above. While the lively philosophical dialogue in *On Anger* may sway his readers away from the passions and admiration of great tragic lines, the virtuosic moments in his tragedies may steer the audience in the other direction. What is to stop us from finding *Medea*'s promise of self-creation an example of passion-driven greatness that Seneca so deplors and has worked so hard to correct in his philosophy? Indeed, this problem seems to haunt Seneca. In *On Mercy*, Seneca again condemns Accius's line, but also laments, "and somehow or other savage and hateful minds have expressed their forceful and excited thoughts with more favorable material" (*ac nescioquomodo ingenia immania et invisa materia secundiore expresserunt sensus vehementes et concitatos*, 2.2.2). Writing here a few years after the publication of *On Anger*, Seneca admits that characters like Atreus and *Medea* have a better script with which to express themselves and their "more favorable material" explains why they have power over people and can be mistaken for possessing *magnitudo animi*. How can Seneca nullify their power? His theory of the origins of the passions may provide an answer.

At the start of book two of *On Anger*, immediately after his discussion of Accius's line and false greatness of soul which concluded the previous book,

45 NUT. *Rex est timendus*. ME. *Rex meus fuerat pater*.

NUT. *Non metuis arma?* ME. *Sint licet terra edita*.

NUT. *Moriere*. ME. *Cupio*. NUT. *Profuge*. ME. *Paenituit fugae*.

NUT. *Medea*—ME. *Fiam*. NUT. *Mater es*. ME. *Cui sim vide*.

Seneca addresses the question of whether anger begins with our judgment or by an uncontrollable impulse (*quaerimus enim ira utrum iudicio an impetu incipiat*, 2.1.1). For a Stoic like Seneca, the answer is clear. Anger springs from reason and judgment, as do all the passions. The Stoics believed that the soul was entirely rational. Thus the passions do not come from an irrational part of the soul, but rather are the result of our beliefs and judgments about events, although most often our reason is misguided about the true value of people and events. Seneca also argues that the origins of our emotions may spring from pre-rational reactions. He sets out a three-step process (2.4.1):

And so that you might know how the passions begin or grow or are carried away, the first movement is not voluntary, as if a preparation for emotion and a type of threat; the second is voluntary but not defiant, if it is right for me to be avenged when I have been hurt, or it is right for someone to pay the penalty when he has committed a crime; the third movement is already out of control, which avenges not if it is right, but no matter what, and defeats reason.⁴⁶

Seneca notes that these first, non-voluntary movements happen even to the Stoic wise man (2.2.2), and offers several examples, such as when our hairs stand on end, or the uncontrollable shiver that comes over us when doused with cold water (2.2.2). Most significant for our purposes is that Seneca states that the pre-emotions come over us when watching theater productions or hearing readings about the past (2.2.3). Similarly, if stage productions or historical readings do not arouse our anger, the sight of a shipwreck on stage does not cause sadness (*tristitia*, 2.2.5). In stark contrast to Plato and Aristotle, who in different ways put such stock in our emotional reactions to drama, Seneca declares that the emotions are not involved, only the preliminary preludes to emotion. This is a powerful theory for allowing the audience to engage dispassionately and critically with drama. The flaw is that one has to know it and accept that the feelings that drama arouses are simply uncontrollable responses and not emotions for this theory to have a chance of working.⁴⁷

46 *et ut scias quemadmodum incipiant adfectus aut crescant aut efferantur, est primus motus non voluntarius, quasi praeparatio adfectus et quaedam comminatio; alter cum voluntate non contumaci, tamquam oporteat me vindicari cum laesus sim, aut oporteat hunc poenas dare cum scelus fecerit, tertius motus est iam inpotens, qui non si oportet ulcisci vult sed utique, qui rationem evicit.*

47 Schiesaro 1997, 109–111.

Elsewhere in his philosophy, Seneca encourages this form of critical spectatorship and advises against the suspension of disbelief. In letter 80 (7–8), he writes:

That man, who strides broadly across the stage and says the following with his head thrown back, ‘Behold, I command Argos; Pelops left the kingdom to me, which stretches from the Hellespont and the Ionian Sea to the Isthmus,’ is a slave, who receives five measures of grain and five denarii. That man who is overly proud and out of control and swollen with confidence in his strength and says, ‘Unless you are silent, Menelaus, you will fall by this hand,’ receives his daily allowance and sleeps on a little patch-work blanket.⁴⁸

In other words, remember, it’s just a play you’re watching.

Seneca’s plays do frequently draw attention to themselves as works of art. The metatheatrical elements of Seneca’s plays manifest themselves in several ways. Characters consider their place in the literary and mythological tradition. At the start of *Thyestes*, the ghost of Tantalus returns to earth and asks, as if questioning the author himself, “Into what evil am I being transcribed?” (13). Medea and Atreus describe how they want the story of their crimes to be remembered (Medea 52–53, Atreus 192–93). Medea looks to her own past for inspiration (40–55). When he is plotting his revenge, Atreus looks to the mythological tradition and asks Procne and Philomela to inspire him (275–76). Clytemnestra as well looks to the mythological tradition, and perhaps even to her own story for inspiration and the courage to kill Agamemnon (*Ag.* 116–22).⁴⁹ Several of Seneca’s *dramatis personae* actively shape themselves into character; they call themselves by name and encourage themselves to act in accordance with their mythological reputations. After Oedipus blinds himself, he self-referentially notes, “This face is fitting for Oedipus” (*vultus Oedipodam hic decet*, 1003). In the *Troades*, Ulysses is initially deceived by Andromache’s attempts to save her son, Astyanax, from being executed by the Greeks. He is ready to leave and tell the Greeks the news of the boy’s death, but then in an aside he corrects himself, “What are you doing, Ulysses? Will the Greeks believe you? . . . Now call up your cunning, my soul, now fraud and deceit, now

48 *Ille qui in scaena latus incedit et haec resupinus dicit, en imperio Argis; regna mihi liquit Pelops, qua ponto ab Helles atque ab Ionio mari urgetur Isthmos, servus est, quinque modios accipit et quinque denarios. Ille qui superbus atque inpotens et fiducia virium tumidus ait, quod nisi quieris, Menelae, hac dextra occides, diurnum accipit, in centunculo dormit.*

49 Tarrant 1976, 196.

the complete Ulysses" (*quid agis, Ulixē? Danaidae credent tibi / . . . nunc advoca austus, anime, nunc fraudes, dolos, / nunc totum Ulixem*, 607, 613–14). We have already looked at Medea's famous declaration that she will "become Medea." Near the end of the play she declares, "Now I am Medea" (*Medea nunc sum*, 910). After "becoming Medea" and killing her first son, Medea takes on the role of dramaturge as she directs a play within the play. She orders herself to kill her second child on the roof of the palace, in full view of the Corinthians, "Now do this my soul: your virtue must not be wasted in hiding, let the people approve of the deeds of your hand" (*nunc hoc age, anime: non in occulto tibi est / perdenda virtus; approba populo manum*, 976–77). She states that her actions will have been futile unless witnessed by Jason, to whom she refers as "that spectator" (*spectator iste*, 993). Like Medea, Atreus takes on the role of dramaturge. At the end of the play, he directs his slaves to open wide the doors to Thyestes's dining room so that he may joyfully witness his brother's unknowing cannibal feast (901–902).

As the conclusions of *Medea* and *Thyestes* make clear, spectatorship is a key theme within the plays. This theme is perhaps no more pronounced than at the end of *Troades*. As the captive Trojan women listen, the messenger gives the report of how eager the Greeks were to witness the spectacle of the sacrifice Astyanax, even climbing atop trees to get a better view (1082–83). One "savage spectator" goes so far as to sit atop the tomb of Hector (*ferus spectator*, 1087). The theatrical qualities of Polyxena's sacrifice are even more pronounced. The landscape around the site is shaped "in the manner of a theater" (*theatri more*, 1125). The Greek spectators are moved by the decorous appearance of the young woman as well as the strength and fearlessness of her soul (1144–46). They marvel and pity her (*mirantur ac miserantur*, 1148). This high level of metatheater in Seneca's plays can be investigated from a primarily literary standpoint. Seneca is self-reflexively using his plays to comment on his position as an author. Yet, they can also be seen as commenting on, and perhaps contributing to, the Stoic ideal of disengaged, critical spectatorship. Perhaps the metatheatrical elements in Seneca's plays contribute to shattering the dramatic illusion. To borrow a term from the modern theater, the self-reflexive nature of Senecan drama may be a form of "alienation effect" that distances the audience from the world of the play and encourages critical spectatorship, both of the play itself and the world around us.⁵⁰ Yet if Seneca was

50 The term originates with Bertolt Brecht and the contrast he established between traditional theater which encourages audience sympathy and hence no impetus to change the world and his own "epic theater" which by means of the "alienation effect" encourages critical spectatorship, see Brecht 1996, 121. Nussbaum 1993, 146–48 makes this connection

hoping to cut off his audience's emotional reactions, why do his plays so vividly describe the emotional reactions of the characters? How can he be sure that these reactions are not a cue to us to react similarly, especially in the case of the sacrifice of children?

Cultural context may again offer a means for understanding Seneca's love of metatheater in his plays. The ability to detach oneself and draw clear boundaries between drama and reality was particularly difficult in Seneca's time, which, as Shadi Bartsch has demonstrated, was a period of theatricality run amok.⁵¹ Seneca's prose reflects, but also contributes to and shapes, this vision of early Imperial Rome. The world, as Seneca's philosophy makes clear, is itself a dramatic spectacle. In his philosophy, Stoic progress and self-construction are often viewed in theatrical terms. Seneca scripts monologues of self-creation for his Stoic hero Cato (*De prov.* 2.9–11, *Ep.* 24.7), as well as for his hoped-to-be philosopher-king Nero at the start of *On Mercy* (1.1.2–4). In *On Providence*, Seneca imagines the death of Cato as a performance on the world stage for the delight of the gods. In letter 120, Seneca notes that the goal of the Stoic is to “play one person” (120.22). This is precisely what the majority of Seneca's characters do in his plays.⁵² Although there is a strong element of self-aware theatricality in both Senecan philosophy and drama, each body of work takes this theme in a different direction. It is used for the shaping of a Stoic in the prose works, but for the creation of passion-driven villains in the plays. Reading Senecan drama and philosophy in tandem can have a stereoscopic effect, as if Seneca is working through ideas, such as the means and methods of self-creation, the theatricalized self, and critical spectatorship, under different lenses.

If we wished to create a simple dichotomy, Seneca's plays might be seen as negative examples. Indeed, if Seneca's characters show us anything, it is how not to live our lives, as Christopher Gill remarks.⁵³ Yet the negative-exemplar answer, as well as the Stoic ideal of detached, critical spectatorship, can be critiqued when we consider the fascination and power that many of Seneca's characters hold over us. In addition, technical aspects of the Stoic theory of the passions are also problematized at points. On the one hand, many of Seneca's

as does Littlewood 2004, 50. Schiesaro 2003, 246–51 provides a critique of Brechtian elements in Senecan drama.

51 Bartsch 1994, 1–62.

52 See, however, Dodson-Robinson 2010, who argues for a strong intersubjective contamination of agency. There is a debate about whether Seneca's characters represent the dissolution of the self (Fitch and McElduff 2002; Gill 2006, 421–35; Busch 2009) or its creation and possible perfection (Nussbaum 1994, 439–83, Bartsch 2006, 255–81, Star 2012, 62–83).

53 Gill 2006, 422–23.

characters follow Stoic theory in that they have not lost all traces of reason. Medea, Phaedra, Clytemnestra, and Atreus in particular, “think their way into their passions.”⁵⁴ They urge themselves to stir up, maintain, and follow their emotions. As Medea says, “Anger, I follow where you lead” (*ira, qua ducis, sequor*, 953). These facts suggest several connections to Stoicism.⁵⁵ On the one hand, “following anger” is a dark echo of the central Stoic tenet that one must follow nature or fate.⁵⁶ Yet this claim also stresses the deliberate choice Medea and others have made to assent to their passions. This psychological surrender also produces drastic physical changes which are often described at length in the plays. This interest in the physiological manifestations of the passions can also be found in Seneca’s philosophy. *On Anger* is particularly concerned with this phenomenon. For example, Seneca opens the dialogue by noting that anger cannot be hidden, but bursts forth and radically changes one’s appearance and manner of acting (1.1.5).

Atreus provides an interesting comment on this phenomenon. Atreus succeeds as a ruler, albeit a self-described tyrannical one, not only because he is able to recognize the truth of his emotions—Thyestes has no idea why his body is reacting in terror despite the supposedly festive occasion—but also because he is able to control them. When he first sees his brother returning, Atreus says to himself, “I can hardly control my soul, my pain hardly holds on to the reins” (*vix tempero animo, vix dolor frenos capit*, 496). He then describes his psychological state with a lengthy simile that compares his violent impetus against his brother to a hunting dog straining at the leash and ripping his master along with him once his quarry comes near (497–503). This comparison suggests Atreus’s descent into the world of the beasts and that his emotions are taking total control of him. Unlike beasts, however, Atreus is able to control himself, even when his prey comes towards him. He notes, “When anger hopes for blood it does not know how to be hidden, nevertheless, let it be hidden . . . let good faith be displayed” (*cum sperat ira sanguinem, nescit tegi— / tamen tegatur . . . / praestetur fides*, 504–5, 507). Atreus then acts the part of the contrite brother who is happy to see Thyestes return. Does his paradoxical ability to control his anger despite its violent onset teach us something about the passion that Seneca’s philosophy does not? Perhaps Seneca’s plays suggest truths about the passions, and specifically our ability to control them, that Stoic theory is unwilling to admit.

54 To adopt the language of Gill (1997, 224), which refers solely to Phaedra; see also Gill 2006, 421–35.

55 There are also important literary echoes. Seneca’s Medea alludes to Ovid’s Medea, “I will follow where anger will lead” (*quo feret ira, sequar*; *Her.* 12.209).

56 See Striker 1991 on the Stoic ideal of “following nature;” and Seneca *On the Private Life* 5.1.

In conclusion, Seneca's philosophy does not provide us with any method for interpreting his plays as unambiguous pieces of Stoic didacticism, and to do so assumes that we are certain Seneca's intentions in writing drama were simply to illustrate his philosophy. As we have seen with Atreus's ability to hide his anger, or Medea's use of Stoic *sententiae*, Seneca can contradict, or at least challenge, Stoic theory. This critical attitude toward Stoicism is also present in his prose works, and may also be seen as a point of common ground between the two bodies of work. In fact, there are several such points of commonality, including strong rhetorical and metatheatrical connections. There is the same love of extended monologues and of memorable epigrams. In both bodies of work there are minute descriptions of vice, violence, and the passions. Of course, these connections need not point to any Stoic concerns, but rather may be more general stylistic or rhetorical links. Another explanation might look to the history of the Julio-Claudian period for answers. The horrors that we find in both Seneca's plays and prose, which may once have seemed safely distant from the world of Rome, have now entered the souls of Rome's rulers and the majority of humanity. Seneca makes this progression clear in *On Anger*, as his examples of the horrors of this passion move from Persian despots, to Greece, and finally to Rome.⁵⁷ The world of Seneca's plays can seem like the world of Seneca's Rome, as seen in both the later historians who wrote about the period, and in Seneca's philosophy. Caligula mimics Atreus; Nero acts the part of Orestes the matricide, the blinded Oedipus, and the insane Hercules (Suet. *Nero* 21.3). Wealthy Romans adopt the attitude of kings (*Ep.* 47.20), and keep pools of lampreys in which to throw their slaves (*On Anger* 3.40.2–3). Their greed for exotic food and drink risks turning them into Tantalus.⁵⁸ Seneca's tragedy, perhaps even more so than his philosophy, demonstrates the difficulties inherent in living a moral life in the world. Stoicism may have helped Seneca gain a critical perspective on the horrors of vice, the passions, and tyranny, but, as we know from his biography, he still remained dangerously close to this world, and, as plays tacitly admit, paradoxically attracted to it.

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57 Anger in the barbarian world (3.14–15), to Rome (3.18.1–3.19.5) to the individual (3.36), see the discussions of Nussbaum 1994, 402, and Ker 2009b, 194.

58 Berno 2003, 171–74.

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Senecan Tragedy and the Politics of Flavian Literature

Peter J. Davis

That the impact of Senecan tragedy upon Roman literature was immediate and powerful is clear from the serious poetry written under the Flavian dynasty. This chapter will focus on engagement with the political aspects of Senecan tragedy in Statius's *Thebaid*, Valerius's *Argonautica*, and the anonymous *Octavia*.¹

1 *Octavia*

Of these works *Octavia*, a tragedy in Roman dress, is probably the nearest in date to Seneca's plays² and certainly the closest in form. And of course it is the only work in which the tragic Seneca actually appears. That it is the tragic Seneca (and not only the philosopher) who stands before us is clear from his opening speech. Like Oedipus in *Oedipus*, like Hecuba and Agamemnon in *Troades*, and like the singers of *Agamemnon*'s first choral ode,³ Seneca begins with reflections on Fortune's deceptiveness. Next he evokes our memories of *Thyestes* by speaking of banishment in a manner that recalls Thyestes's reflections on the benefits of exile (*Thy.* 417–18) and by picturing the world's collapse in terms which bring to mind that play's final choral ode. Finally, he gives us

¹ I do not discuss Silius Italicus in this chapter because *Punica* does not seem to engage significantly with Senecan tragedy.

² Some (e.g. Barnes 1982; Kragelund 1988, 2002; Habinek 2000; Wiseman 2001; Flower 2002) favor the brief reign of Galba (October 68–January 69 CE); others, notably the two most recent commentators on the play, Ferri (2003, 5–30, esp. 16–17), and Boyle (2008, xiv–xvi), favor a Flavian date. For detailed arguments (in my view decisive) in favor of a Vespasianic date see Smith 2003, 425–29. The claim that the play was written by Seneca himself is unsustainable and requires no discussion here. For summary of the case against Senecan authorship, see Boyle 2008 xiii–xiv; for detailed discussion of non-Senecan features of *Octavia*'s language, see Ferri 2003, 31–42.

³ *Oed.* 6–11, *Tro.* 1–14, *Ag.* 57–72.

an account of the world's ages and a denunciation of present sin in language reminiscent of Hippolytus's diatribe in *Phaedra* (525–58).

With Nero's entry, however, we move from mere allusion to Senecan tragedy to re-enactment, for, as is widely recognized, *Octavia's* dramatist now rewrites *Thyestes's* second act, with Nero and Seneca playing the roles of Atreus and his minister. Here it is worth noting that although Seneca marks Nero's entry in the conventional way (435–36), the inscribed stage direction is deficient, for Nero enters not alone but accompanied by an unnamed prefect. Unlike Atreus, who begins by delivering a powerful expression of self-rebuke and self-incitement, Nero issues peremptory commands: *perage imperata. mitte, qui Plauti mihi / Sullaeque caesi referat abscisum caput* ("Carry out my orders. Send a man to kill Plautus and Sulla and bring me back their severed heads," *Oct.* 437–38).⁴ Nero is a man familiar not just with power's theory, but with its practice.⁵

Central to both scenes is a debate between a tyrant and his minister on the way that power should be exercised (*Thy.* 204–20; *Oct.* 440–592). The debates have much in common, with the ruler in each adopting what we might call the Machiavellian position and with his servant playing the role of moralist. Their lengths, however, are very different, for while the argument between Atreus and his minister takes fewer than twenty lines, that between Nero and Seneca is protracted, with two quick-fire exchanges (440–61; 533–92) flanking two contrasting analyses of the nature of Augustus's rule (472–532).

The first phase of the debate between Seneca and Nero has much in common with that between Atreus and the minister. Both, for example, focus on the importance of popular approval and on the concepts of fear and glory.⁶ But there are also important differences, for the anonymous *satelles* is in a much weaker position than Seneca, the tyrant's former tutor. Note, for example, that we are reminded that Seneca was once Nero's teacher (445–46) and that, teacher-like, Seneca begins with a moral injunction: "You shouldn't take decisions against your kin without good cause" (440). Atreus's *satelles*, by contrast, begins with an ignorance-revealing question: "Aren't you afraid of the people's hostile talk?" (204–5). Hence it is not surprising that Atreus has a monopoly of zingers when dealing with his minister, while the first round of the debate between Seneca and Nero produces no clear winner. And so Nero concludes by attempting to justify the executions of Sulla and Plautus and Octavia's imminent death in terms that

4 Quotations of *Octavia* come from Boyle 2008. Translations are my own.

5 As Boyle 2008, lxviii observes: "The contrast between Seneca's sixty lines of verbose and problematic idealism (377–436) and Nero's two lines of historical action (437–38) already indexes to whom the world belongs."

6 Popular approval: *Thy.* 204–207, *Oct.* 460–61; fear: *Thy.* 207, 208, *Oct.* 441, 458; glory: *Thy.* 207–11, *Oct.* 454.

remind us of Atreus's entry, for, like Atreus, Nero remains unavenged (*inultus*, *Oct.* 463; cf. *inulte*, *Thy.* 178):⁷ Nero is back where Atreus started.

The next phase (472–532) takes the form of speeches concerning the nature of Augustus's rule, with Seneca presenting Rome's first emperor as the embodiment of the values propounded by Atreus's *satelles* and Nero emphasizing his Atreus-like qualities. Like the minister, Seneca believes in the importance of society's support for the ruler (*fauor*, *Thy.* 209; *Oct.* 486). Like Atreus (211–12), Nero prizes unwilling prayers (*ab inuitis preces*, 493) and stresses the importance of fear in sustaining imperial rule (*Thy.* 207, 208; *Oct.* 494, 507, 526). In advocating mercy, Seneca reprises his own role as imperial adviser in *De Clementia*. It must be acknowledged, however, that Nero's representation of Augustus as avenging Atreus is more detailed, more vivid, and more persuasive.

The Seneca-Nero debate closes with a second stichomythic debate on the nature of power (570–87), this time prompted by Nero's decision to divorce Octavia and marry Poppaea. The terms of the dispute resemble both those in *Thyestes* and those in the earlier argument over the deaths of Plautus and Sulla. Again, Seneca asserts the importance of moral values, while Nero asserts the primacy of the ruler's will and shows contempt for popular support (*fauor*, 577; cf. *Thy.* 209).⁸ Although there is perhaps no clear winner, the discussion proves otiose, for Nero ends the scene by revealing that Poppaea is pregnant and that he intends to marry her the next day (590–92).

While the argument between Seneca and Nero provides *Octavia's* best-known example of a scene based on *Thyestes's* second act, there is a second scene that demands attention, the soliloquy and debate that constitute act 5 (820–76).⁹ Nero's opening lines confirm that he is the new Atreus (*Oct.* 820–24):

O lenta nimium militis nostri manus
et ira patiens post nefas tantum mea,
quod non cruor ciuilis accensas faces
extinguit in nos, caede nec populi madet
funerea Roma, quae uiros tales tulit.¹⁰

7 Boyle 2008, 192 points out this connection.

8 For defence of A's reading (*fauor*) against Avantius's emendation (*furor*), adopted by Zwierlein 1986 and Fitch 2004, see Boyle 2008, 214–15.

9 For the symmetry of these two scenes see Herington 1961, 22. Manuwald 2003, 54 points out that the Nero-prefect is actually closer to the Atreus-*satelles* scene than the Nero-Seneca scene.

10 "O too slow are my soldiers' hands and too patient is my anger after such a monstrous crime. No citizen blood extinguishes the torches inflamed against me, nor is funereal Rome, who produced such men, drenched in her people's slaughter."

Like the Atreus of *Thyestes*'s second act, Nero embodies anger (*ira*, 821; cf. *iratus Atreus*, *Thy.* 180). Both rulers express dissatisfaction with their actions thus far: Atreus regrets that the whole world is not engulfed with iron and fire (180–84), while Nero laments that there has not been a wholesale massacre of citizens (822–24) and calls for the complete destruction of his people (831–33). And, like Atreus, Nero regards death as too light a penalty (824; cf. *Thy.* 246–48).¹¹

At 844–45, however, a prefect enters, presumably the man who was dispatched to kill Sulla and Plautus in act 2. At this point *Octavia*'s dramatist gives us a second rewriting of the debate between Atreus and his minister. Like the Senecan *satelles*, the prefect is anonymous. And like the *satelles* (but unlike *Octavia*'s Seneca), the prefect is an underling who complies with his ruler's commands. While Nero's position is straightforward (he demands greater vengeance and longs, like Atreus, for a crime that posterity will not forget [857]), that of the prefect is complex, for while not opposing the emperor's demands, he tries to moderate them. He has, for example, killed a few leaders of the opposition (846), not the entire people; and while he is willing to kill a woman (860), he is reluctant to kill Octavia. On the other hand, he appreciates as much as Atreus's *satelles* the importance of both fear and loyalty when dealing with a tyrant (*timor*, 858; *fidem*, 863; cf. *fides timorque*, *Thy.* 335).

This twofold rewriting of *Thyestes*'s second act points to the most obvious thematic connection between *Octavia* and *Thyestes*: both plays are concerned with tyranny. Indeed it could be argued that *Octavia*'s focus on this theme is more overt than that of *Thyestes*, for the word *tyrannus* occurs ten times in *Octavia*, only twice in *Thyestes* (177, 247) and thirteen times in all eight authentic tragedies.

How then do *Octavia* and *Thyestes* differ in their treatment of this issue? I propose to begin answering that question by considering the roles of the chorus in the two plays. Perhaps the most obvious difference is that whereas *Thyestes* has one chorus, a chorus of Argive citizens, *Octavia* has two, a chorus of Roman citizens and a chorus of supporters of the marriage of Nero and Poppaea.¹² There are, however, more important differences. First, one of the distinguishing features of *Thyestes*'s chorus-members is their lack of understanding of the nature of Atreus's rule. Particularly telling is the fact that even though the chorus-members witness the reconciliation of Atreus and Thyestes

11 Ferri 2003, 360, and Boyle 2008, 264 note additional allusions to *Thyestes*.

12 There is of course one other obvious difference: Seneca uses a variety of meters in choral odes, while *Octavia* employs only anapaests. For identification of the chorus in *Thyestes* see Davis 1993, 58; for identification of the choruses in *Octavia* see Ferri 2003, 342–43 and Boyle 2008, 252.

in act 3, they completely misunderstand the nature of what they see. Further, their philosophical reflections on the nature of kingship in Ode 2 and celebration of peace in Ode 3 reveal only their impotence and lack of comprehension of the play's world.¹³ If we turn to *Octavia* we find two choruses actively involved in politics. The members of the first chorus, who sing Odes 1, 2, and 5, represent the Roman people and oppose the emperor's new marriage, while the members of the second chorus (Odes 3 and 4) support Poppaea. While the people have no role to play in *Thyestes*, their opposition erupts into violence in *Octavia*, requiring military force to be suppressed: Nero is a tyrant but one whose power generates resistance.

And if *Thyestes* ends with Atreus's triumph, *Octavia* foreshadows the eventual success of popular opposition to Nero. *Octavia*'s original audience would have known that the prediction of Octavia's Nurse that an avenging god would arise (*uindex deus / existet aliquis*, 255–56) would be fulfilled in the form of Vindex's rebellion in 68 CE, the event that would lead to Nero's downfall. Agrippina's ghost, moreover, forecasts Nero's death in terms sufficiently accurate for the audience to realize that her prophecy is true, for she refers to the Senate's decree that the emperor be flogged (*uerbera*, 620), to Nero's flight (*fugam*, 620) and to his lonely death by means of a sword through the throat (630–31).¹⁴ *Octavia* differs from *Thyestes* in prefiguring the tyrant's end.

2 Valerius Flaccus's *Argonautica*

Perhaps because *Argonautica* seems to allude so rarely to Senecan drama, there has been little discussion of Valerius Flaccus's response to the tragedies.¹⁵ And yet both Flavian epicist¹⁶ and Julio-Claudian dramatist plainly share an interest in one of the most popular and most powerful characters in Greco-Roman mythology: Medea.

I would like to begin, however, by examining Valerius's exploitation of *Thyestes* in his depiction of Iolcus and Colchis. The political situation in Valerius's Iolcus bears a remarkable resemblance to that in Seneca's Argos.

13 For the role of the chorus in *Thyestes* see Davis 1988; 2003 61–69.

14 Cf. the account of Nero's death in Suet. *Nero* 48, 49.

15 For a brief survey of work since 1871 on Valerius's use of Senecan tragedy see Grewe 1998, 173–74.

16 That Valerius Flaccus writes in the Flavian period is clear from the dedication to Vespasian and his sons (1.1–21) and references to the capture of Jerusalem in 70 (1.13) and the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 (3.209, 4.507).

Both cities are victims of fraternal strife. Thus Valerius, as Zissos points out, alludes to the tradition that “Pelias drove his half-brother Aeson from power.”¹⁷ We learn that Pelias is troubled by fear of his brother’s son and devises the Colchian expedition in order to kill him (1.26–7, 31–2). But it is the end of Book 1 which most reminds us of *Thyestes*, for when Pelias’s vengeance against his brother is frustrated by the suicide of Aeson and Alcimede, the tyrant’s men murder Jason’s brother and add his body to the corpses of his kin (*adduntque tuis*, 1.824), just as Atreus adds Plisthenes’s body to that of young Tantalus (*adicitque fratri*, *Thy.* 726–7).¹⁸

If we turn to Colchis we find a similar situation. Again we have hostility between brothers, Aeetes, the current ruler, and Perses, the aspiring usurper. Indeed, we have full-scale civil war in Book 6 of the kind described in *Thyestes*’s third choral ode (560–72). Valerius even foreshadows alternation of rulers on the Argive model: after the eventual expulsion of Aeetes, Perses will rule, only to be replaced in turn by an elderly Aeetes (5.680–8). And central to the hostility between both sets of brothers is dispute over a golden fleece (*Thy.* 225–9; v. Fl. 5.259–72).

It is not surprising, however, that the most important Senecan text for Valerius Flaccus is not *Thyestes*, but *Medea*. Indeed *Medea*’s Argonautic odes are fundamental to *Argonautica*’s ideological structure. Here are the opening lines of the first Argonautic ode: *audax nimium qui freta primus / rate tam fragili perfida rupit* . . . (“Too daring was he who burst through treacherous seas in such a fragile ship” . . ., *Sen. Med.* 301–302).¹⁹ And here are the first four lines of *Argonautica* (v. Fl. 1.1–4):

Prima deum magnis canimus freta peruia natis
fatidicamque ratem Scythici quae Phasidis oras
ausa sequi mediosque inter iuga concita cursus
rumpere flammifero tandem consedit Olympo.²⁰

¹⁷ Zissos 2008, 124.

¹⁸ The connection is noted by Zissos 2008, 411. For more detailed discussion of Valerius’s use of *Thyestes* in Book 1 see Galli 2002. She argues that Pelias is modelled on Atreus and emphasizes the importance of the fleece and the motif of gigantomachy.

¹⁹ Quotations from Seneca’s tragedies come from Zwierlein 1986.

²⁰ “First seas penetrated by the great sons of gods we sing and the fate-speaking ship, which, having dared to pursue the shores of Phasis and to burst its middle course through clashing mountains, settled at last on fiery Olympus.” Quotations from Valerius Flaccus come from Liberman 1997, 2002.

In just four verses, Valerius manages to recycle five of the first ten words in Ode 2, with *ausa* (“dared”) recalling *audax* (“daring”); *ratem, rate* (“ship”), *prima, primus* (“first”); *rumpere, rupit* (“burst”); and with *freta* (“seas”) remaining unchanged.²¹ As Martha Davis rightly argues, Valerius employs allusion in the poem in order to signal “the close relationship between the two works.”²²

That the relationship is indeed close is apparent, for example, from Valerius’s description of the storm which afflicts Argo as soon as it sets sail. While the sending of the tempest by Aeolus and its quelling by Neptune explicitly recall *Aeneid* 1, the Argonauts’ reaction is presented in terms reminiscent of the *Medea*’s second and third odes. The storm provokes terror (*horror* 1.621, *pauentes* 635 cf. *metus Med.* 338), prompts reflection on the fact that Minyans’ ancestors did not sail (1.628, cf. *Med.* 329–30) and leads the men to exclaim that the sea should be left inviolate (*seponite fluctus* 1.632; cf. *mare sepositum Med.* 339).

While scholars argue whether Valerius presents Argo’s voyage as a positive or negative development for humankind,²³ there is at least one disastrous consequence, the bringing of Medea to Greece. Unlike Apollonius of Rhodes, Valerius Flaccus consistently foreshadows the tragedy to come, Jason’s treachery, and Medea’s killing of her children. He does so, moreover, in terms which explicitly recall the Senecan version of events. Consider, for example, Mopsus’s prophecy, the first in the poem (1.224–6):

quaenam aligeris secat anguibus auras
caede madens? quos ense ferit? miser eripe paruos
Aesonide. cerno et thalamos ardere iugales.²⁴

Allusion to the Senecan (and Ovidian) account of the bloody events at Corinth is unmistakable. Note the escape on a chariot drawn by winged serpents and the destruction of the palace (cf. *Med.* 885–6, 1023).²⁵ In Euripides, by contrast,

²¹ *Peruia* picks up Sen. *Med.* 372: *peruius orbis*.

²² Davis 1989, 61.

²³ For a positive view see Stover 2012; for statements of a negative view see Zissos 2009; Davis 2010.

²⁴ “What woman, drenched with slaughter, cuts through the air on winged serpents? Whom does she strike with the sword? Poor Jason, rescue your little ones. And I see a wedding chamber burning.”

²⁵ These same details (destruction of the palace, serpent-drawn chariot) are found at v. Fl. 5.450–54.

Medea destroys only the princess and Creon by fire (Eur. *Med.* 1184–1203) and escapes by means of Helios's chariot, a chariot usually drawn by horses (1321).²⁶

If we turn to Book 5, the book which brings the Argonauts to Colchis and launches the poem's second half, we find a reminiscence of one of the most striking sections of Seneca's first Argonautic ode (*Med.* 361–63):

Quod fuit huius pretium cursus?
aurea pellis
maiusque mari Medea malum,
merces prima digna carina.²⁷

Jason introduces himself to Aeetes as follows: *rex Hyperionide, quem per freta tanta petendum / caelicolae et prima dignum statuere carina . . .* ("King, son of Hyperion, whom the gods decided I should seek over great seas, man worthy of the first ship . . ., v. Fl. 5.471–2). These lines are overtly flattering. *Hyperionides* ("son of Hyperion") is a grandiose patronymic found nowhere else in Latin literature, and, of course, the claim that the gods decided that Jason should seek out Aeetes is false: the responsibility for that decision belongs to Pelias. Furthermore, it is Medea, not Aeetes, whom Jupiter singles out when he explains the importance of Jason's voyage (1.547): she is the one whom the gods decided Jason should seek over the great seas. There is irony in the fact that Jason's flattery of Aeetes points to both the true nature of his mission and its disastrous consequences.

Also noteworthy is the fact that, like Seneca, Valerius links Argo's voyage with the Trojan war. This shared concern is most evident in the catalogue of Argonauts that we find in both the tragedy and the epic. In their third ode, *Medea's* chorus lists Argonauts who suffered subsequent disasters, several of whom are connected with the Trojan war: Tiphys, because of his tie with Aulis (622–24); Oileus, whose son Ajax was destined to die on the voyage back from Troy (661–660b); and Nauplius, who would try to lure the returning Greeks

26 For the horses cf. Eur. *El.* 866, *Ion* 41, 1148–49, *Phaeth.* 2–3. There is no persuasive evidence for the common claim that the Euripidean Medea escapes in a chariot drawn by serpents: (1) there is no reference to serpents at the end of the play; (2) Schmidt 1992, 396 points out in her *LIMC* entry "Medeia" that the earliest representations (from southern Italy, c. 400 BCE) of Medea escaping in a serpent-chariot are probably not connected with Euripides's text; (3) the hypothesis and scholia which refer to serpents are centuries later than the first production (431 BCE). For discussion see Mastronarde 2002 377–78 and Boyle 2012, 5, plus note 18.

27 "What was the prize/price of this journey? The golden fleece and an evil greater than the sea, Medea, merchandise worthy of the first ship."

to their deaths (658–59). Valerius, too, lists heroes with Trojan associations: Nauplius (372); Nestor (380); Philoctetes (391), Peleus, father of Achilles (403);²⁸ and Menoetius, father of Patroclus (407). Valerius's treatment of Oileus in particular (*et tortum non a Ioue fulmen Oileus / qui gemet, Euboicas nato stridente per undas*, "and Oileus, who will lament the thunderbolt not sent by Jove, while his son hisses over Euboea's waters," 1.372–3) seems to allude to Seneca's *Medea* (*fulmine et ponto moriens Oilei / <pro suo gnatus> patrioque pendet / crimine poenas*, "Oileus' son, dying by thunderbolt and sea, will pay the penalty for his own crime and his father's," 661–660b).²⁹

It is clear that Valerius places his *Argonautica* within the tradition that treats Argo as the first ship and does so in terms which explicitly recall *Medea*'s Argonautic odes. But what has this to do with politics? Note that Jason claims that Argo's voyage marks an important stage in human development: first, it represents an opening up of earth, sky and sea (1.168–9); and, second, it forms part of Jupiter's plan to bring about exchange (*commercia*) in his world and to unite mighty human efforts (1.246–7). We also learn from the narrator at 1.498–500 that Jupiter does indeed approve of Jason's mission. But Argo's voyage represents more than a major technological advance, for it marks an important stage in humanity's political history. This is made clear in Jupiter's speech at 1.531–60, a speech that, like Jupiter's address to Venus at *Aeneid* 1.257–96, foreshadows major shifts in world power. In Valerius's *Argonautica*, Jupiter sets out a sequence of ages in which empires rise and fall. Jason's journey constitutes a key moment in the fall of Asia and the rise of the west, for it opens the way for war across the sea (1.542–6). In particular, it makes possible the Trojan War, a connection emphasized, as we have seen, by both Seneca and Valerius. Jupiter declares, in the language of his Virgilian predecessor, however, that Greek hegemony will not last, for the Danaans will be supplanted by others in Jupiter's favor: *gentesque fouebo / mox alias* ("Soon I will foster other nations," 1.555–6).³⁰ In other words, Valerius, like Seneca, presents Argo's voyage as the beginning of a process which will lead to Rome's empire and to its dominion beyond the sea.³¹

28 Valerius reinforces the link between Peleus and Achilles at 1.255–70 by having Peleus address his young son.

29 I incorporate Zwierlein's 1986 proposed supplement into the text. Valerius's description of Idmon (1.360–61) even more obviously alludes to this ode (652).

30 Cf. Virg. *Aen.* 1.281–82.

31 *Medea* 379 almost certainly alludes to Claudius's invasion of Britain (Nisbet 1990, 96); *Argonautica* certainly does (1.7–9).

3 Statius's *Thebaid*

That *Thebaid* reworks themes from Senecan tragedy is not disputed. John Henderson put it like this: "It is in this sense that Statius' *Thebaid* enacted its central role in the representation to itself of its culture, feeding on a marginalised fake-Tragedy, the pseudo-dialogic image-repertoire of Seneca's play-script remakes, but reinstating Epic form's demand to bespeak Power for social practice."³² As with Valerius's *Argonautica*, affinities with *Thyestes* are clear. The plots of *Thebaid* and *Thyestes* are alike: both deal with quarrels between brothers, one regnant, one exiled; both end in grisly slaughter.³³ *Thebaid*, moreover, alludes to the Senecan myth at a number of points, to the ancestors of the Mycenaean royal house, Tantalus and Pelops (6.280, 284), to the disappearance of the sun and the sudden appearance of the stars (1.325, 2.184, 3.307, 11.127–9), to the deadly banquet (3.307), to Atreid cannibalism (8.742), and to fraternal feuding: "here too other brothers were joining battle" (*et hic alii miscabant proelia fratres*, 4.306–8). And both works focus on the nature of tyrannical power. But if *Thebaid*'s affinities with *Thyestes* are clear, the epic's connections with *Oedipus* and *Phoenician Women* are clearer still, for, as the poem's name suggests, it concerns the Theban royal family, the house of Oedipus.

I propose to turn now to a number of episodes in which Statius clearly draws upon Seneca's *Oedipus* and *Phoenician Women*. Let's begin at the beginning. As soon as his proem is complete, Statius introduces Oedipus (*Theb.* 1.46–8):

impia iam merita scrutatus lumina dextra
merserat aeterna damnatum nocte pudorem
Oedipodes longaue animam sub morte trahebat.³⁴

Here, Statius alludes twice to Seneca's *Oedipus*, with *scrutatus lumina* ("having probed his eyes") recalling the messenger's description of Oedipus's self-blinding (*scrutatur . . . lumina*, "he probes his eyes," 965) and with *longaque . . . sub morte* ("in a long death") reminding us of the messenger's instruction that Oedipus should "choose a long death" (*mors eligatur longa*, 949). Note, too,

³² Henderson 1991, 52.

³³ The connection has been noted before. See, for example, Vessey 1973, 77: "There are analogies too in the *Thyestes*. In that drama, two brothers, cursed by their father and members of a *devota domus*, claim the same throne and meditate mutual vengeance."

³⁴ "Having already probed his impious eyes with guilty hand, Oedipus had plunged his guilty shame in eternal night and was dragging out his life in a long death." Quotations from *Thebaid* come from Shackleton Bailey 2003a and 2003b.

that Statius's Jupiter refers to Oedipus in precisely the same terms as Seneca's Delphic oracle: *reuolutus in ortus* ("returning to his origins" Sen. *Oed.* 238; Stat. *Theb.* 1.235). These allusions suggest, as Vessey argues, that "the Oedipus of the *Thebaid* is the Senecan Oedipus; it is as if Statius was continuing the story from the point at which the tragedian had left it."³⁵ Although the primary model for Oedipus's prayer to Tisiphone (1.56–87) is Virgilian,³⁶ with Oedipus playing the role of Juno, its content, the call for war between brothers, is drawn from Oedipus's curse upon his sons in *Phoenician Women* (328–47; 350–55). Also note that the prayer to Tisiphone is effective, for the Fury travels to Thebes, infects Eteocles and Polynices with frenzied discord (1.123–64), and so triggers the action of the entire poem. In this way, as Boyle observes, "Seneca's Oedipal plays are the motor of Statius's epic vision."³⁷

I would like to turn now to *Thebaid* 4 and an episode that rewrites the events of *Oedipus's* third act. Faced with troubling portents of war, Eteocles turns to Tiresias for aid (4.406–9), just as Oedipus had, when he was attempting to learn the identity of Laius's killer. And as in act 3 of *Oedipus*, Tiresias turns to the art of necromancy in *Thebaid* 4 (406–645).

The similarities between the two episodes are clear. First, they are structured in similar ways. Both begin with a description of a dismal wood suitable for grim proceedings;³⁸ in both black sheep and cattle are sacrificed,³⁹ in both Tiresias employs threats and has to summon the ghosts twice,⁴⁰ and in both the Theban ghosts include Niobe, Agave, Pentheus, and Laius among their number.⁴¹ Second, the episodes are linked by verbal allusion. Thus Statius's Tiresias rejects the use of divination by means of birds or entrails (4.410), just as the Senecan Tiresias had done (390–92). Statius's ghosts are described as a "bloodless crowd" (*uulguisque exsangue* 4.519), as are Seneca's (*exsangue uulgu*, 598).⁴² Even more striking is the language in which both ghosts of Laius denounce their son's incest. The Senecan Laius claims that Oedipus "forced himself upon his origins and piled impious offspring on his mother" (*egitque*

35 Vessey 1973, 72. Delarue 2000, 146 makes a similar point: "C'est en écartant la continuité dramatique que s'établit une continuité psychologique."

36 Cf. Juno's appeal to Allecto at *Aen.* 7.331–40. For *Thebaid's* use of *Aeneid* 7 and *Phoenician Women* see Ganiban 2007, 30–33.

37 Boyle 2011, xci.

38 *Oed.* 530–47, *Theb.* 4. 419–442.

39 *Oed.* 548–58, *Theb.* 4.443–72.

40 *Oed.* 561: *minax* "threatening," 567, *rursus* ("again"); *Theb.* 4.507–18 (the threat), 473–87, 501–18 (the two speeches).

41 Niobe (*Tantalus*): *Oed.* 613, *Theb.* 4.576; Agave and Pentheus: *Oed.* 615–18, *Theb.* 4.565–67.

42 The phrase occurs nowhere else in Latin literature.

in ortus semet et matri impios / fetus regessit, 638–39), while the Statian Laius reckons that his son “turns himself towards his origins and piles children on his innocent/shameful mother” (*qui semet in ortus / uertit et indignae regerit sua pignora matri*, 4.631–2).⁴³

But noting similarities is not enough. The question that we need to ask is: why does Statius include this scene of quasi-Senecan necromancy? First, we should note that the episode cannot be said to advance the epic's plot. Eteocles summons Tiresias because he wants to understand the meaning of strange omens (4.406–9). When Laius's ghost departs, however, he leaves Eteocles and Tiresias just as puzzled as if they had consulted Delphi's oracle (*flexa dubios ambae*, “in doubt at his twisting riddles,” 4.645).⁴⁴ But we should also note that Tiresias, by summoning these ghosts, repeats in literal form a task constantly performed in other ways by *Thebaid's* narrator, for the epic is obsessed with the Theban past. In fact, the necromancy is even more strongly reminiscent of other episodes in *Thebaid* than it is of act 3 of *Oedipus*. In the proem (1.4–14), for example, Statius reminds us of the city's first generation, of Cadmus and the earthborn men, and of the generation that struggled against Bacchus. We see the same obsession in Aletes's speech in Book 3 (179–214), a speech that recalls not only Cadmus and the Bacchic generation, but also Niobe and Actaeon. Taken together, the proem, speech and necromancy point to the centrality of heredity in Statius's narrative. Jupiter puts it like this: *mens cunctis imposita manet* (“their assigned character abides in all,” 1.227).⁴⁵

If concern with the Theban past is prominent in *Thebaid*, it is also significant in Seneca's *Oedipus*.⁴⁶ The play alludes frequently to Cadmus, the city's founder,⁴⁷ to Amphion,⁴⁸ the builder of the city's walls, to Actaeon,⁴⁹ the youth destroyed by his own hounds, to Ino and Palaemon, and, most importantly, to Agave and Pentheus.⁵⁰ Their importance is underlined when the messenger reports the blinded Oedipus's cry that Cithaeron send him Agave (933),

43 For further discussion of the implications of this allusion see Parkes 2012, 277.

44 Cf. Creon's comment at *Oed.* 214–15: *ambae flexa Delphico mos est deo / arcana tegere*, “it is the Delphic god's habit to conceal his secrets in twisting riddles.” The phrase *ambae flexa* (“twisting riddles”) occurs nowhere else in Latin literature.

45 For discussion of other similar episodes and the importance of heredity in *Thebaid* see Davis (1994).

46 And not only *Oedipus*. Heredity is also a key concept in *Agamemnon*, *Phaedra*, *Thyestes* and *Troades*.

47 *Oed.* 29, 110, 176, 233, 436, 446, 626, 713, 751, 1006.

48 *Oed.* 179, 612.

49 *Oed.* 756, 932.

50 *Oed.* 363, 436–44, 615–18, 933, 1004–1007.

and again when the chorus-leader likens the distraught Jocasta to Pentheus's mother (1004–1007). It is Laius's ghost who establishes the connection between these pairs: they are examples of distorted "mother love" (*maternus amor*, 630).⁵¹

While Seneca highlights inherited patterns of criminality within the Theban royal family, Statius extends that insight to encompass all human beings and other animal life as well.⁵² To begin with, Statius is concerned not just with Thebes, but also Argos, Athens and, by implication, Rome.

Like Seneca, Statius emphasizes the continuity between Theban past and Theban present. In *Thebaid*, the history of Thebes is a story of the seduction of women by gods (Jupiter and Europa, Jupiter, and Semele), of fathers cursing sons (Agenor and Cadmus), of banishment of sons (Cadmus), of fraternal strife (the earthborn men), of hostility of children towards their native city (Bacchus and Thebes), of unwitting crime (Actaeon), and of divine and human vengeance (Bacchus's destruction of Pentheus and Agave, Juno's killing of the family of Ino and Athamas, Latona's slaughter of Niobe's children, Diana's slaying of Actaeon and the brutal murder of Dirce by Amphion and Zethus). And the past finds its parallels in the present. Think of Oedipus's curse upon Eteocles and Polynices, of the banishment of Polynices, of the strife between Eteocles and Polynices, of Oedipus's unwitting killing of Laius and marriage to Jocasta, of Polynices's hostility towards Thebes, and of Jupiter's vengeance on the entire city.

The histories of Argos and Athens are remarkably similar to that of Thebes. In Argos we find divine seduction of women (Jupiter with Io, Danae, and Alcmena; Neptune with Amymone; Apollo with Psamathe), banishment (Atreus and Thyestes in turn), fraternal strife (Danaus and Aegyptus, Atreus and Thyestes), unwitting crime (Coroebus, Thyestes), divine and human vengeance (Apollo's destruction of the Argives, Juno's hounding of Hercules and Io). So, too, in Athens, where we find that Theseus bears striking resemblances to both Oedipus and his sons. Statius foreshadows the birth of Hippolytus by references to Hippolyte's pregnancy (12.539, 635–38) and anticipates Theseus's cursing of his son by use of the epithets *aequoreus* ("sea-born" 12.730) and *Neptunius* (*Neptunius heros*, "hero, son of Neptune," 12.588; *Neptunius* . . . *Theseus* "Theseus, son of Neptune," 665), a term used of Theseus by Phaedra in *Heroides* 4 (*Neptunius heros*, 109). As a father who curses his son,

51 Boyle 2011, 258 points out that "*maternus amor* conflates the different situations of Agave and Pentheus, one the one hand, and Jocasta and Oedipus, on the other, as *exempla* of perverted 'mother love'."

52 Hostility between brothers is as prevalent on Olympus as it is on earth. See Davis 1994, 481.

Theseus is a second Oedipus.⁵³ He is also a new Eteocles or Polynices, since like them he is responsible for his father's ruin, as the epithet *Aegides* ("Aegeus's son" 12.546, 769) and allusions to Aegeus's death (12.624–26) and the Ariadne story (7.686, 12.581–82, 12.665–71) remind us.

Nor is it difficult to see resemblances between Rome and the poem's mythical cities. Venus and Mars are, in different ways, ancestors of both Thebes and Rome.⁵⁴ The mythic history of all three cities involved divine rape of women and fratricidal enmity: Rhea Silvia/Ilia is the Italian equivalent of Europa, Semele, Io, Danae, Alcmena, Amymone, and Psamathe, while Romulus and Remus are the Roman analogues of the Spartoi, Eteocles and Polynices, Atreus and Thyestes.⁵⁵ And at a political level readers might well detect resemblances between Theseus and Vespasian,⁵⁶ both being outsiders who put an end to civil war, while the quarrel between Eteocles and Polynices might seem to prefigure the civil war of 69 CE or possibly the alleged rivalry between Titus and Domitian.⁵⁷ That the poet expects us to ponder such possibilities is confirmed when he addresses Caesar in the prologue (1.17–33), regards him as reader in the epilogue (12.814), and when he contrasts Thebes with an unnamed city, a city which is described in terms that others had used of Rome, a city with an empire of the same extent as the Roman.⁵⁸ Like Seneca's *Oedipus*, and indeed like other Senecan tragedies,⁵⁹ *Thebaid* is a work obsessed with the past as a determinant of the present.

I would like to turn now to *Thebaid* 11, a book which brings together the principal characters from *Oedipus* (Oedipus, Jocasta) and *Phoenician Women* (Oedipus, Antigone, Jocasta, Eteocles, Polynices). Although the epic's penultimate book has more in common with *Phoenician Women* (the time is some years after Oedipus's self-blinding, Jocasta is still alive and the struggle between Eteocles and Polynices is a major focus), it also draws language and ideas from *Oedipus*. Book 11 climaxes with brothers' mutual slaughter, an event foreshadowed but not enacted in either *Oedipus* or *Phoenician Women*.⁶⁰

53 As Ahl 1986, 2896 and Dominik 1994, 93–95 have pointed out.

54 Venus and Mars are parents of Harmonia, wife of Cadmus. Venus is of course mother of Rome's remote founder, Aeneas, while Mars is father of Rome's actual founder, Romulus.

55 Vessey 1971, 381; Ahl 1986, 2812; Dominik 1994, 153.

56 Vessey 1973, 315 n.1.

57 Dominik 1994, 161; 179. See Suet. *Dom.* 2.3.

58 *Theb.* 1.144–51 (absence of luxury); cf. Virg. *G.* 2.461–65 (absence of luxury); *Theb.* 1.157–62 (extent of empire).

59 For this see Boyle 1997 Ch. 5.

60 *Oed.* 237–38, 321–23, 359–65, 645–46; in *Phoen.* the battle between brothers is an issue central to the first scene and the event that Jocasta attempts to prevent in the second.

Stattius, however, draws upon Seneca for both the prelude and the aftermath of the duel.

Before the duel begins both *Phoenician Women* and *Thebaid* give us scenes in which a female relative attempts to prevent Eteocles and Polynices from risking fratricide. In *Phoenician Women* Jocasta stands on stage between her sons and their armies and speaks alternately to Polynices and Eteocles. In *Thebaid* 11, by contrast, Jocasta confronts Eteocles within the city, while Antigone appeals to Polynices from the city wall.⁶¹

Consider Stattius's account of Jocasta's approach to Eteocles. Distraught, she approaches Eteocles (11.315–18) and is immediately likened to Agave: *Pentheia qualis / mater ad insani scandeat culmina montis, / promissum saeuo caput adlatura Lyaeo*. ("Just as Pentheus' mother climbed the summit of a crazed mountain in order to bring the promised head to cruel Bacchus," *Theb.* 11.318–20). Compare Jocasta's words as she enters the stage for the first time in *Phoenician Women* (363–65):

Felix Agaue: facinus horrendum manu,
qua fecerat, gestauit et spoliū tulit
cruenta nati maenas in partes dati.⁶²

Note, too, that in her appeals to Eteocles in both works Jocasta envies Oedipus's blindness and regrets that she herself can see (*Phoen.* 496–98, *Theb.* 11.333–35).

If we turn to the duel's aftermath we find Oedipus, Antigone and Jocasta playing their accustomed roles. We find Oedipus entirely dependent upon Antigone and seeking a sword with which to commit suicide and Antigone frustrating that desire. And then we find Jocasta armed with a "well-known sword" (*notum . . . ensem* 11.635), the sword that was used to kill Laius, and in fact the same "well-known sword" that Oedipus requested from Antigone in *Phoenician Women* (*notum . . . / ensem* 106–107). It is also the sword with which Jocasta kills herself in *Oedipus* (1034–35). In this way Stattius represents Jocasta's death in terms that recall both *Oedipus* and *Phoenician Women*.

Central to *Thebaid* 11, indeed the climax of the whole poem, is the mutual slaughter of the two brothers, Eteocles and Polynices. Allusion to Seneca's

61 Eteocles has been attempting to offer a sacrifice at Jupiter's altar (11.205–8). For Antigone's location, see 11.356.

62 "Lucky Agave: she bore the horrendous crime in the hand that had committed it and, a bloodstained maenad, she carried the spoils of her dismembered son." Reference to Agave might easily (and rightly) be construed as allusion to *Oedipus*. The context, however, makes the case for allusion to *Phoenician Women* even stronger.

Oedipus-plays at this point in the epic highlights the web of family relationships and the corruption that the pursuit of power entails. That power is the problem is explicit in both *Phoenician Women* and *Thebaid*. When Polynices asks his brother whether he is willing to sacrifice fatherland, household gods and wife for the sake of kingship (*regno*, 662), Eteocles declares: *imperia pretio quolibet constant bene* ("Power is well worth any price," 664). These are the play's last words. Statius's narrator states the issue between the brothers in similar terms: *sed nuda potestas / armauit fratres, pugna est de paupere regno* ("but naked power armed the brothers, the fight is for impoverished kingship," 1.149–50).

Thyestes is important for all three of these Flavian works. *Octavia* rewrites *Thyestes* as history, transforming Atreus into Nero and the nameless *satelles* first into Seneca and then into the anonymous prefect. In Valerius's *Argonautica* Jason leaves behind a *Thyestes*-like situation in Iolcus only to encounter another in Colchis. *Medea*, however, is still more important, for Valerius not only responds to the ideological content of the Argonautic odes, but also foreshadows the Senecan version of the tragedy to come.⁶³ In *Thebaid*, Statius presents the fraternal struggle for power central to *Thyestes* as prevalent among both gods and humans and exploits *Oedipus* and *Phoenician Women* in his representation of the tangled and perverted relationships that typify the Theban royal family. Seneca's tragic vision is an essential constituent of key works of the Flavian era.⁶⁴

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63 For this, see Davis 2010, 7–11.

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PART 2

Renaissance and Early Modern



Seneca Rediscovered: Recovery of Texts, Redefinition of a Genre

Gianni Guastella

1 The Tragedies of Seneca in Antiquity and Their Later Reception

The tragic texts attributed to Seneca assume a signal importance in the Western literary and theatrical tradition only after they resume circulating in Europe as the first examples—and for a long time the only examples—of a body of ancient dramatic writing. In the ancient and medieval texts that have come down to us, we find relatively little information about the circulation of Seneca's plays in imperial times or in late antiquity. Seneca himself is rarely mentioned as a playwright.¹ In the form known to us today, the *corpus* of Senecan tragedy emerges after a long gestation period. In the manuscript tradition, the traces of this process are very scarce indeed,² and it is only at

¹ See Franceschini 1938b, 3–12, Brugnoli 1957, 209–32 and 2000, 242–43, Pastore Stocchi 1964, 10–18, Trillitzsch 1978, 124–27, Schmidt 1978, 59–71 and the critical apparatus of Zwielerlein 1987. Possible echoes of Senecan tragedy in the literary production between the first and ninth centuries are listed by Trillitzsch 1971, 49–119 and 186–206, Schmidt 1978, 31–58, Hiltbrunner 1985, 977–78 and Zwielerlein 1983, 27–39. The very biography of the author needed to be discussed for a long period between the fourth and sixteenth centuries before the figures of Seneca the “tragedian” and Seneca the “philosopher” could be satisfactorily reconciled. Starting from the fourth century at least, the Cordovan philosopher was confused with his father, and was also long thought to have held a brief correspondence with the apostle Paul (see Momigliano 1950, Bocciolini Palagi 1978a). In the fourteenth century, an erroneous interpretation of a distich by Martial (1.61.7–8, already misinterpreted by Sidonius Apollinaris, *carm.* 9.230–38) led scholars such as Boccaccio and Petrarch to distinguish between the figures of Seneca “philosopher” and Seneca “tragedian” and question the authorship of the *Octavia* (the latter issue was resolved by Coluccio Salutati, in a letter of 1371 to Tancredo Vergiolesi, *Epist.* 3.8): see Pastore Stocchi 1964, 32–4, Martellotti 1972, 151–65, Bocciolini Palagi 1978b, Ker 2009, 197–200. The first “canonical” reconstruction of Seneca's biography may be found in Justus Lipsius's *De vita et scriptis L. Annaei Senecae* (Lipsius 1605, xiii–xiv).

² Excerpts from *Medea* and *Oedipus* can be found in the celebrated Ambrosian palimpsest of the fifth century (Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, G 82 sup.: see Questa 1984), and sections from *Troades*, *Medea*, and *Oedipus* in the *florilegium Thuanenum*, of the ninth century (Paris.

the end of the eleventh century in the Italian area that we find the first complete surviving manuscript.³ In fact, it is not until the fourteenth century that Seneca's plays acquire the paradigmatic importance that they maintain until the end of the eighteenth century, as a reference source for the rebirth of European tragedy.⁴ In the following pages, I would like to focus on the crucial phase of the tradition between the end of the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth centuries, when Senecan tragedies became an object of intense interest and study for medieval scholars.

2 The 'Forgotten' Tragedy

During the long time span between the end of antiquity and the late Middle Ages, the fact that no ancient tragedy was available to Western scholars to be read directly and completely ultimately reduced knowledge of the entire tragic genre itself to a jumble of fragmentary information. What grammarians and later "encyclopedists" like Isidore of Seville had said about tragedy had long been the only available source of information.⁵ In the collective medieval imaginary, a bizarre picture of ancient theatrical performance took shape. The stage was described as a kind of raised platform occupied both by the poet-*recitator* who read his text to the public, and by actors and dancers who illustrated the text by means of gestures and dance. Almost nothing was known about the costumes or theatrical technique employed by these actor-mimes, except for the odd generic report about individual features like buskins, which had a merely symbolic value.⁶ From a literary point of view, tragic style was

Bibl. Nationale, lat. 8071, fol. 57v–58r: see Munk Olsen 2000, 178–79). In the tenth century, Eugenius Vulgarius shows some knowledge of all the tragedies except the *Octavia* (see Brugnoli 1957, 216–22, Zwierlein 1983, 39, Pittaluga 2002, 217–28).

3 Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 37.13, known as *Etruscus*.

4 The manuscripts of family A, which also include the *Octavia*, appeared only in the early thirteenth century in the Anglo-French area. The *Octavia* is not included in the *Etruscus* or the manuscripts that directly derive from it. For a detailed account of the influence of Senecan tragedies in European culture see Lefèvre 1978. The masterpieces of Attic tragedy began to be read in the West during the last years of the fourteenth century and, as shown by Flashar 2009, became paradigmatic for European theatrical culture only from the first half of the eighteenth century.

5 See Kelly 1993, 5–110.

6 Buskins were mentioned in Antiquity as symbol of the *gravitas* of the tragic genre: see Hor., *Ars poet.* 80 and 280, Ov., *rem. am.* 375 (*Grande sonant tragici; tragicos decet ira cothurnos*), *Trist.* 2.1.554, Apul., *Met.* 10.2, Serv. ad *Buc.* 8.10.

classified as *gravis* (serious) and *altisonus* (sublime), while from the specifically narrative standpoint, tragedy's *genus dicendi* was classified as "dramatic" because, apart from the voices of the characters engaged in dialogues and monologues, no other narrative voice ever appears in it (as happens in epic poetry).⁷

Finally, the aspect of tragedy that was, perhaps, considered to be its most salient feature by medieval descriptions concerned the construction of the plot. Isidore of Seville (who did not know the tragedies of Seneca)⁸ presented the ancient tragedians as writers who related the unlucky or criminal misadventures of ancient kings.⁹ Such stories were often viewed from a moralizing perspective strongly influenced by Boethius's condemnation of "worldly goods" such as wealth and power: those goods which, according to the *De consolazione philosophiae*, were destined to be annihilated by the reversals of Fortune.¹⁰ This schematic stereotype often reduced the meaning of tragedy to little more than an illustration of how Fortune overturned the condition of the powerful. Reciprocally, the downfall of the great, in the medieval imagination, coincided with the contours of the tragic plot—beginning with the happiness of the socially eminent and ending in its opposite: the abyss of misfortune into which arrogant rulers were destined to fall.

Conversely, these medieval definitions of ancient theater described comic plots as stories that began unhappily and reached a happy ending. In the twelfth century, we even find a trace of this conception of tragedy that had made its way into idiomatic usage: the expression "tragic beginning and comic end" became a way of wishing someone happiness as we read in a well-known passage from Hugutio of Pisa's *Derivationes* (s. v. *Oda* [O 11, 862–64 Cecchini], §§16–18):

7 See Isid., *Orig.* 8.7.11: *Apud poetas autem tres characteres esse dicendi: unum, in quo tantum poeta loquitur, ut est in libris Vergilii Georgicorum: alium dramaticum, in quo nusquam poeta loquitur, ut est in comoediis et tragoediis: tertium mixtum, ut est in Aeneide. Nam poeta illic et introductae personae loquuntur.* ("There are three characteristic ways of speaking among poets. In one, only the poet speaks, as in Vergil's *Georgics*. Another way is the dramatic form, in which the poet never speaks, as in comedies and tragedies. The third is a combination of the two, as in the *Aeneid*, where not only the poet speaks but also the introduced persons," trans. Henry A. Kelly 1993).

8 See Franceschini 1938b, 3.

9 *Orig.* 18.45 and 8.7.6.

10 See Boeth., *Phil. cons.* 2.pr.2: *Quid tragoediarum clamor aliud deflet nisi indiscreto ictu Fortunam felicia regna vertentem?* ("What else does the clamor of tragedies bewail but Fortune overthrowing happy kingdoms with an unexpected blow?" Trans. Kelly 1993).

The difference between tragedy and comedy is that comedy contains the acts of private persons, tragedy those of kings and magnates. Comedy is written in a humble style, tragedy in a high style. Comedy begins in sad matters but ends joyfully, whereas tragedy is the reverse. Whence we are accustomed in our salutations to send and wish to friends a tragic beginning and a good and joyful end.¹¹

Between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, following this conception of tragedy, a number of writers made clumsy attempts to produce tragic pieces. Unfamiliar with the poetic forms of the ancient dramatic texts, they composed their “tragedies” in elegiac distichs like the *Mathematicus* or *Patricida* by Bernardus Silvestris or the *Versus de Affra et Flavio*, by an anonymous author,¹² or they resorted to hexameters.

An example of this is John of Garland’s ambitious attempt to write a tragedy shortly before the mid-thirteenth century, as part of his *Parisiana poetria de arte prosaica metrica et rhythmica*¹³—the aim of which was, in fact, to illustrate the *Proprietates tragedie*.¹⁴ Instead of a tragedy, the story invented by John of Garland looks more like an episode taken from an epic poem written in a vaguely Ovidian style. During the siege of a city, two washerwomen vie for the love of the same soldier. Their conflict ends in bloodshed as the loser gains revenge by killing her rival along with her lover and handing over the city to its enemies. The only inappropriate ingredient here, according to Hugutio’s definition, is the curious choice of characters, who could hardly be said to belong to the spheres of power. The “tragic” feeling of the brief composition is conveyed by its *gravis* (serious) style and a plot movement that starts out happily and ends in tears.¹⁵ In obeying these thematic and stylistic criteria, an author

11 Trans. Kelly 1993. *Et differunt tragedia et comedia quia comedia privatorum hominum continet facta, tragedia regum et magnatum. Item comedia humili stilo describitur, tragedia alto. Item comedia a tristibus incipit sed cum letis desinit, tragedia e contrario. Unde in salutatione solemus mittere amicis et optare tragicum principium et comicum finem, idest bonum et letum principium et bonum et letum finem.*

12 Edited by Teresa D’Alessandro, Federica Landi and Raffaella Bonvicino respectively in Bertini 1994, 7–269. See Kelly 1993, 96–8.

13 Edited by Raffaella Bonvicino in Bertini 1994, 271–325.

14 *Proprietates* that the author summarizes thus (Chapt. 7, Lawler 1974, 136): *gravi stilo describitur; pudibunda proferuntur et <s>celerata; incipit a gaudio et in lacrimas terminatur* (“it is written in the high style; it deals with shameful and criminal actions; it begins in joy and ends in tears,” trans. Lawler 1974).

15 See Pastore Stocchi 1964, 22–24 and Pittaluga 2002, 301–3. On the relationship between John of Garland and the medieval tradition of the tragic see Traugott Lawler 1974, 262–64.

writing in this period would have had no choice but to glean his “tragic” inspiration from pieces of poetry (or history) embedded in other literary genres: and in doing so he might even have managed, at times, to strike a poetic chord that was not too unlike that found in the ancient tragic texts.

3 The Form of Seneca's Text: Lovato and Metric Analysis

The reemergence of Seneca's plays, which began to be carefully studied, especially in Italy, from the beginning of the fourteenth century, provided new motivation to acquire knowledge about ancient tragedy. Henceforth, the isolated attempts to write tragedy began to look more like the old classical dramas: writers finally had a precise (and single) ancient model to go by. Yet, readers continued to interpret this model according to medieval expectations: they saw tragedy as an example of the “dramatic” genre described by ancient rhetorical and grammatical sources, as a paradigm of noble and grave style, and as a group of stories that could be classified (not always without effort) under the heading of how Fortune overthrew the powerful. On the specifically theatrical level, however, the model contained no useful information about the actual dynamics of ancient stagecraft since no explicit indications about dramatic performance were to be found in it.

In this regard, we would do well to remember that since late antiquity all continuities with the tradition of classical theater had been completely severed. The most recent forms of dramatic performance were mainly associated with the religious and popular spheres and closely connected to liturgical celebrations. Their characteristics were quite unlike those of the theater of the Greeks and Romans. To begin with, the spaces in which they were staged, as the occasion required, were within or adjacent to sacred locations. What was meant by “recitation” during the Middle Ages could best be grasped if one frequented churches and church-squares and watched scenic enactments (usually very brief) whose texts (when there was a text) did not really meet the criteria of the “dramatic” genre,¹⁶ and were written in verses (with the music that accompanied them) whose structure did not match the metric conventions adopted in the ancient plays.

The long process that gradually led to a more grounded understanding of Senecan texts, and of classical tragedy in general, began in Veneto in a milieu

16 A narrating voice was frequently inserted between the lines exchanged among the various characters. For an example of this technique, see Dronke 1994, xxvi–xxviii and 24–5.

that for the first time adopted a “humanistic” approach to ancient culture.¹⁷ A central figure of that milieu and of the new interest in Seneca’s dramatic works was Lovato Lovati (ca. 1240–1309), a notary and judge in Padua, *podestà* of Bassano and Vicenza, and a trusted political authority.¹⁸

Early humanists in Veneto were particularly interested in the formal aspects of the Senecan texts, whose metric structure was not easy to decipher. Since late antiquity, the scanty information available on the versification of the great classic tradition had aroused little interest. Some authors (such as Horace)¹⁹ had briefly mentioned the use of iambics in productions for the stage, and in the texts of the grammarians enough information could be gathered to identify the types of meters employed and their possible variations. But the grammarians, in cataloguing the typologies of ancient meters, rarely went beyond describing the sequence of feet within the verses they examined, and they did not usually accompany their descriptions with any particular analysis of the texts, confining themselves to citing a very few examples (sometimes created especially for that purpose). With such fragmentary information available to them, medieval scholars were not in a position to recognize the typical metrical forms of ancient theatrical writing.²⁰

The reappearance of Seneca’s tragedies was the first opportunity to fill this gap. In the manuscripts studied by the Paduan scholars, we find notes indicating the various meters, accompanied by brief formulas taken from Servius’s handbook *De centum metris* (or *Centimeter*).²¹ Lovato and the members of his circle had the opportunity to read these notes, at least in a codex of the E branch of Seneca’s tragic manuscript tradition. According to an intriguing theory proposed several times by Giuseppe and Guido Billanovich,²² Lovato may have come across the progenitor of this branch of the tradition in the abbey of Pomposa: the *Etruscus* manuscript,²³ which Lovato, plausibly, had copied, integrating its text with that of the other branch of the tradition (branch A, which also contained the *Octavia*). Thus, perhaps, began the intricate process

17 See Witt 2000, 81–173.

18 On Lovato see Kohl 2007. In the words of Witt 2000, 116, “Lovato was largely responsible for making Seneca the most important classical author for the next generation of humanists.”

19 Horace, *Ars poetica*, 79–82; 251–62.

20 The metric structure of the comedies of Terence, the only playwright whose works were continuously read throughout the Middle Ages, eluded the readers of the period, who in many cases copied the text as if it were prose.

21 See Zwierlein 1983, 24–5.

22 Billanovich 1994, 217–22 (with references to the previous bibliography).

23 See footnote 3, MacGregor, 1983, and Monti and Pasut 2013, 214–15.

of contamination between the two families of the manuscript tradition, which Otto Zwierlein patiently attempted to reconstruct.²⁴ In fact, the *Etruscus* does contain notes like the one taken from Servius's *Centimeter*,²⁵ which describes the iambic trimeter in the following terms: *Metrum iambicum archiloicum constat trimetro acatalectico*. With the aid of such information, Lovato (himself a poet)²⁶ was the first who succeeded in analyzing tragic meters in detail. His study method is documented in the *Nota domini Lovati iudicis et poetae Patavi*.²⁷ In this brief piece, Lovato analyzes the structure of all the possible variations of iambic trimeter, illustrating his points with verses from Seneca's texts. There is every reason to believe that Lovato was drawing on the information about metrics from the *Etruscus* (or a manuscript closely related to it).²⁸ Proceeding with the same methodology as his grammatical source, he appears to have gone on to label all possible variations of every single foot of the trimeter, and finally to have appended to each of these variations an example that was nearly always taken from *Hercules furens*.²⁹

Lovato extended this same approach to the other meters used by Seneca in his tragedies. We can readily infer this if we look at the *Evidentia tragediarum Senecae*, one of three short works composed by Albertino Mussato (1261–1329)³⁰—the best known member of Lovato's circle—to illustrate Seneca's theatrical works.³¹ The *Evidentia*, which Mussato dedicated to Marsilius of Padua, is a brief dialogue between the author and Lovato, who, in replying to his pupil's questions, discusses the particular characteristics of Seneca's main

24 Zwierlein 1983, 59–129.

25 Elice 2013, 13: *archilochium constat trimetro acatalecto, ut est hoc, | Martem fatigat prodigus uitae furor*. The line used by Servius as an example (collected among the fragments "Incerta Incertorum" 22, p. 240 Ribbeck²) is, as usual, an *exemplum fictum* (see Elice 2013, cxxv–cxlvi and 114–15).

26 Witt 2000, 17 notes that "*the earliest surviving humanist writing* are the Latin poems written by Lovato dei Lovati in 1267/68" (my italics): see also Witt 2000, 65–71.

27 Lovato's nephew Rolando da Piazzola transcribed this text to fol. 246v of the codex Vatican City, Vatican Apostolic Library, Vat. Lat. 1769.

28 See Billanovich 1994, 218–19.

29 Only the realization of the first foot with a tribrach and with a proceleusmatic is illustrated using two examples taken from the *Medea* (433 and 670).

30 On Mussato, see Zabbia 2012.

31 The *Evidentia* was edited by Megas 1967, 123–30. The other two works, *Lucii Annei Senecae cordubensis vita et mores* and *Argumenta tragediarum Senecae* were also edited by Megas (1967, 154–61, and 64–8, 1968 27–66). See also the fragments of the commentary edited by MacGregor 1980.

tragic meters³² and adopts the same method evident in the *Nota*. Besides listing the possible patterns of individual feet, Lovato details the origins of the names of the various verses, starting with the iambic trimeter, the meter typically used for dialogue. This verse, already referred to as *archilochium* in Servius's text, is correctly associated with Archilochus, on the basis of a famous Horatian line.³³ Lovato even makes some tentative observations on the functions that several types of verses were supposed to have had. For example, he states that iambic meters served the purpose of a "lamentable narration" (*narratio querelosa*): the expressive vehicle most typical of the tragic genre and centered mainly on the "lament of misfortunes" (*de infortunio conquestio*).³⁴

We should not underestimate the importance of this painstaking analysis of Seneca's verses—based as it was on a precise knowledge of ancient prosody—in renewing interest for ancient tragedy. As Witt has shown,³⁵ such careful attention to the linguistic aspects of ancient poetry was what most characterized the new "humanistic" attitude, and Lovato may be considered its earliest inspirer. Such an attitude was dominated by the desire to follow "in the footsteps of the ancients," drawing direct inspiration from them, in their own language, practicing literature in forms comparable to those of the classic age, according to a cultural project that also had clear political connotations. Witt has given an excellent description of this cultural attitude (2012, 466–67):

The role that antiquity played in Lovato's moral and political thought has to be gleaned from poetic expression where it formed an intimate part of the matrix of his creative imagination. His success at re-creating the music of ancient verse and its texture of feeling encouraged him, not only to identify with an ancient if ill defined secular culture superior to his own, but also to use his richly associative poetry to enhance the ethical values of communal life.

32 In addition to the structure of the iambic trimeter, illustrations are also provided for the anapestic dimetre, the Sapphic hendecasyllable, the adonic, the minor asclepiad and the glyconic. Among the examples cited are also lines from Horace's *Carmina* and Boethius's *De consolazione philosophiae*.

33 *Ars poetica* 79: *Archilochum proprio rabies armavit iambo*. Less appropriate is the derivation of the asclepiad *ab autore Asclepio* and of the glyconic *ab autore Gliconico* (Megas 1967, 129).

34 Megas 1967, 124. See also 125: *pes siquidem iambus turbate mentis passionem in materia querelosa consonantior depromit*. Anapestic meters on the other hand would appear to have been used for transitions from one situation to another (*trasgressiones*).

35 Witt 2000, 52–4, 59, 67–71, 78, 82–116 and Witt 2012, 457–67.

4 Writing a Tragedy: Albertino Mussato's *Ecerinis*

In this new cultural climate, the plays of Seneca became not only a literary model of great importance, but also a stimulus to writing tragedies. In fact, Albertino Mussato himself composed the first original tragedy to be written in many centuries: the *Ecerinis*. In it he managed to recreate the stylistic and metrical characteristics of an ancient drama.

By and large, Mussato, like his master, remained faithful to the medieval views about tragedy that he stated clearly in a section from his *Vita Senece* (Megas 1967, 159):³⁶

Seneca took as his excellent subject matter the most notable sovereigns from Greek history, imitating the Attic writers of tragedy Sophocles and Euripides. For that reason he chose the tragic style which represented the highest and most solemn point of the poetic art suitable for the ruin and fall of kings and generals according to Boethius' well known affirmation in the *De consolazione*. [...] In fact, tragic poetry expresses more appropriately than all the other genres of poetry the greatest afflictions, the greatest joys and other passions of the soul [...] Thus, the name tragedy is given to the style that the tragedians used in two different ways to deal with high matter: either the ruin and fall of great kings and the powerful, mainly through the description of deaths, defeats, massacres, rebellions and ruinous events—and in this case they adopt this type of iambic metre which Sophocles once used in the *Women of Trachis* or our Seneca in these ten tragedies; or battles on the open field and triumphal victories of kings and excellent military leaders—they then write in hexameters as did Ennius, Lucan, Virgil and Statius.³⁷

36 See Stäuble 1980, 47–50.

37 *Ex graecis historiis sublimiores principatus pro materiis luculentis assumpsit* [scil. Seneca] *Sophoclem et Eschilum tragedos athicos imitatus. Sumpsit itaque tragedum stilum poetice artis supremum apicem et grandiloquum, regum ducumque eminentiis atque ruinis et exitiis congruentem, iuxta illum De consolazione Boetii. [...] Proprius enim per trageda carmina exprimuntur et representantur summe tristitie, gaudia, et alie passionis anime quam per alia genera metrorum. [...] Dicitur itaque tragedia alte materie stilus, quo dupliciter tragegi utuntur: aut enim de ruinis et casibus magnorum regum et principum, quorum maxime exitia, clades, cedes, seditiones et tristes actus describunt—et tunc utuntur hoc genere iambicorum, ut olim Sophocles in Trachinis et hic Seneca in his decem tragediis; aut regum et ducum sublimium aperta et campestria bella et triumphales victorias—et tunc metro heroyco componunt, ut Ennius, Lucanus, Virgilius ac Statius. See also Mussato's Epist. 1.87–94 and 101–110 (Materiam tragico fortuna volubilis augeat, | Quo magis ex alto culmine*

There already is something very innovative about this manner of treating the usual notions of the tragic form. In fact, for the first time, considerations of the style and types of plot that characterize tragedy appear alongside a correct identification of the meter in which it *must* be written. And this becomes the distinguishing mark used to separate the *tragedi* who wrote tragedy (Seneca, Aeschylus and Sophocles) from those who wrote epic (Ennius, Lucan, Virgil and Statius). The difference between writing that is fully tragic and that which we might refer to as “epic-tragic” depends on the fact that each particular story line (*ruinae et casus magnorum regum et principum* on the one hand,³⁸ *regum et ducum sublimium aperta et campestris bella et triumphales victoriae* on the other) requires its own appropriate meter (*genus iambicorum* and *metrum heroycum*, respectively). Seneca obviously is the model for the former type of writing.³⁹

The *form of Senecan tragedy*, which Mussato had learnt from Lovato, was an expressive instrument well suited to the strikingly original and highly topical manifesto against tyranny he offered to the community of his fellow Paduan scholars.⁴⁰ In concluding the dedication of his *Evidentia* to Marsilius, he recalls how much his master had inspired the idea that he himself should write a tragedy:⁴¹

I have chosen a few memories of how much I took from Lovato, the Paduan bard. After having examined them for a long time together with him, these themes ended up engraved in my memory. Starting from the information I have gathered up from this and other various sources, I wrote the *Ecerinis* under the veil, so to speak, of an allegoric tragedy with

regna ruunt;/ Illaque conclamans per tristia verba coturnus / Personat Archiloci sub feritate metri. etc.).

38 Cf. *Epist.* 1.87–8.

39 See Kelly 1993, 138–39. In his first *Epistola*, recycling Ovidian formulas, Mussato declares that he was inspired to write iambs by the unknown Muse of the “wrathful tragedy” (71–2 and 103–104). The supreme example of this type of writing may be found in the series of the ten mythical episodes presented by Seneca in his tragedies (77–86).

40 See Chevalier 2000, lxxvi–lxxxi and lxxxvii–xc. Guizzardo da Bologna and Castellano da Bassano, who only a few years after the appearance of Mussato’s work wrote (in 1317) a commentary on it, did not fail to observe this: *Causa finalis eruditio praesentium et posterorum ad policias conservandas et tyrannides evitandas, seu etiam finis sit tyrannorum vituperatio et detestatio* (I quote from Padrin 1900, 79–80).

41 In Megas 1967, 123–24. My trans.

the same temerity with which I shall express these matters before the fullness of your authority.⁴²

The study of Seneca had impressed a precise direction on Mussato's creativity. It was his very familiarity with the ancient model, his understanding of its structure in terms of theme, style, and meter that allowed him to apply the forms of Senecan tragedy to the tale of a tyrant from the recent past, Ezzelino da Romano.⁴³ At the time, *Ecerinis* was considered so important a literary undertaking that on December 3, 1315 the *Collegium artistarum* of the Paduan Studium awarded Mussato the poetic laurel wreath for his achievements both as an historian and as a tragedian.

Ezzelino is portrayed in a typically "Senecanesque" fashion as a dark and thoroughly negative personage whose crimes were inhumanly savage. After learning that, like his brother Alberic, he is the son of Satan, Ezzelino initially abandons himself to his thirst for conquest, extending his dominions from Verona all the way to the March of Treviso, and subjugating, among other places, Padua. Thereafter, he sets his sights on the invasion of all of Italy and Gaul. One of Saint Antony's companions, the Franciscan Luca Belludi, attempts in vain to dissuade him from this enterprise and to get him to repent.

After this episode, Ezzelino's fortunes decline precipitously. The dialogue between tyrant and holy man is hardly over when a messenger enters announcing the fall of Padua. Ezzelino plans a counterattack, but it fails. Forced to retreat, he is slain in battle, as we learn from a dialogue between a messenger and the chorus. The tragedy concludes with an account of the capture and horrific death of Alberico and his family: the chorus reminds the readers that God, who is both strict and merciful, rewards the righteous and condemns evildoers to damnation (622–25). As may be seen just from this brief summary, events such as these could not easily be shown on stage, but were instead recounted by the various characters.

42 *Nonnulla a Lovato, paduano vate, decerpsi quesite rei monimenta, que diu cum eo trutinata mee tandem adhesere memorie; ex quibus aliisque hinc et inde congestis et ego sub unius quasi tragedie figuræ ymagine Ecerinidem sub ea temeritate conscripsi, qua et hec plenitudini tue auctoritatis effundam.*

43 Ezzelino lived between the end of the twelfth century and 1259. The tale of his exemplary fall is used as an allegorical screen through which a clear allusion could be made to the threatening expansionist policy of Cangrande della Scala: see Arnaldi 1980 and Chevalier 2000, xlv–xlix.

To get an idea of the atmosphere in which the story unfolds, we need only consider the first episode and the choral ode that follows it. Adeleita, Ezzelino's mother, reveals to her children that they were conceived after she had copulated with the devil. Thrilled by this news, Ezzelino invokes his father and the whole entourage of infernal powers to help him muster all his hatred and commit the crimes he has in his heart. Immediately thereafter, the chorus intervenes and invites men to renounce the folly of ambition and not to wish for the precarious condition of the mighty, which is imbued with death (122). Governing the destiny of mortals is the inexorable turning of the *rota* cranked by Fortune (146–47).

Mussato's ancient model visibly influences his writing. The stylistic devices he borrows from Seneca are so frequent as to suggest that the ancient tragedian had been his only source of linguistic inspiration.⁴⁴ As might be expected, tones of fear and horror predominate. The atmosphere of Ezzelino's palace is permeated with violence, thirst for revenge, aspirations to *nefas*. Features from classical mythology are ascribed to even the most common figures of the Christian tradition.⁴⁵ When first calling on his father Lucifer, Ezzelino uses the name *Vulcanus* (95);⁴⁶ he then swears by the waters of the Styx that he has always hated Christ (99–101), and finally he requests assistance from the Furies and Persephone herself (102–105).

Mussato's play is the expression of a literary culture that could only manage an imperfect reproduction of the ancient models, especially when it came to handling the specifically dramatic elements. While the 629 lines of the *Ecerinis* are canonically divided into five episodes, each concluding with a choral ode, and in spite of the dialogues and choruses being written in the appropriate meters,⁴⁷ the plot's structure still does not quite comply with the forms of ancient tragedy. The work clearly shows that its roots are in rhetoric. The action takes place over a period covering several years, and Mussato arranges his narration accordingly. Not wishing to stray too far from the conventional narrative techniques of historical or epic works, he assigns a dominant role to

44 For the first 162 lines Chevalier records 13 references to passages from Seneca (half of which are taken from the *Thyestes*) and only one possible reference to Boethius's *De consolatione philosophiae*.

45 Mussato's cultural horizons were obviously those of religion and of his age: see for example the second choral ode, structured like a prayer to Christ (228–80).

46 Further on, the tyrant calls his father *Sathan* (112) and *Pluto* (312).

47 On the meters used by Mussato see Müller 1987, 71–2 and 199.

messengers.⁴⁸ In this way, the account of events is kept in the third person for long stretches of the work, while the episodes in which characters dynamically exchange lines with each other are few, and, in some cases, executed rather clumsily.

In the first act of the tragedy, for instance, Mussato inserts the narrating voice right in the middle of one of Ezzelino's monologues. After learning from his mother that he was the son of the devil, the tyrant prostrates himself and invokes his father. The scene is not described by one of the characters of the play, but by an incongruous narrating voice speaking in the third person (86–90).

Sic fatus ima parte secessit domus
 Petens latebras, luce et exclusa caput
 Tellure pronus sternit in faciem cadens
 Tunditque solidam dentibus frendens humum
 Patremque seva voce letiferum ciet.⁴⁹

What we have here is a way of relating events not suited for the “dramatic genre,” even according to the medieval definitions, which prohibited intervention by the poet's own voice within the text. Mussato had probably unconsciously slipped into a narrative mode that would have been admissible only in a literary genre like epic or in other forms of writing that used the *metrum heroycum*.⁵⁰

48 Chevalier 2000, lii calculates that interventions by messengers take up one third of the entire work.

49 “Thus he spoke and withdrew into the innermost part of the palace, seeking the shadows: and shut away from the light, flat on the ground, falling on his face and touching his head to the ground, he pounds on the hard earth while gnashing his teeth, and with a bestial cry summons his father Lucifer.” Trans. Gary R. Grund 2011.

50 Müller 1987, 67–8. One could think that here Mussato had attempted to introduce one of the stage directions that are found in religious plays (see Lochert 2009, 46–53). Implicitly, Grund (2011, 9), attributes such a function to these lines, since he prints them in italics. Such a choice would be inappropriate considered from a strictly philological standpoint. The use of the iambic trimeter is a guarantee that here we are not dealing with some form of paratext; and in the manuscripts (which contain no element involving “stage directions”) the section is reproduced without any differentiation with regard to the rest of the episode (e.g., Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Magliab. VII 296, fol. 4r). Nor does Guizzardo's and Castellano's commentary give any weight to this kind of shifting perspective in the narration: *Et circa hanc partem iii^{or} facit autor: primo ostendit ad quem locum iverit invocaturus patrem, 2^o patrem invocat et favorem eius exposcit* etc. (ibid. fol. 3v).

Such inconsistency in setting the narrative voice would have gone unnoticed in a reading of the text, and Mussato certainly was not writing with a theatrical performance in mind. Padua honored the *Ecerinis* with a series of public readings,⁵¹ and the tragedy was celebrated as a particularly high form of literary production. Yet, neither the author nor his readers imagined it as a work to be staged.⁵² Tragic writing understood as dramaturgy seemed to have been beyond the ken of the early Paduan humanists: certainly we find no trace of this in either Lovato's or Mussato's handling of the genre.⁵³

Accordingly, the interaction between the characters and the order of their appearance often present problems. An example is the episode following the dialogue between Ezzelino and Luca Belludi. Having just refused the friar's invitation for him to repent, the tyrant declares his allegiance to the world and his devotion to crime. Suddenly, a messenger appears with the news of Padua's fall (412–14). Ezzelino has hardly sent him away when a new character (Ansedisio) confirms the news. He, too, is dismissed in a very few lines (418–22), and is immediately replaced by a group of *Commilitones* who urge the tyrant to do battle (423–31). After the choral ode (432–58), Ezzelino reappears to invite his soldiers to retreat (459–64), and, abruptly following his exit, a messenger announces the tyrant's death to the chorus (465–520). A sequence like this would not have been suitable for presentation on an ancient stage.⁵⁴

51 Mussato himself in the first of his poetic *Epistole* insists on the verb *legere*, when speaking of the honor bestowed on him by the city of Padua (45: *hac saltem Patava tutus in urbe legar*: see also 34–5 and 51 and *Epist.* 4.38).

52 From *Epist.* 4.25–8 (*Carmine sic letam non fecit Statius urbem, / Thebais in scenis cum recitata fuit; / Nec minus hec tragico fregit subsellia versu, / Grata suis metris sic Ecerinis erat*)—a passage that refers to the account by Juvenal (7.83–7) regarding Statius's *recitationes*—it may be inferred that the *Ecerinis* was destined for public reading. See Chevalier 2000, lvii–lviii.

53 When either Lovato or Mussato speaks of “theater” or “scene”, they are very likely referring to makeshift structures from which the poets and above all the improvisers performed their texts: neither author ever mentions mimes accompanying these performances with their gestures. See Lovato, *Epistula ad Bellinum*, 3–5: *cum celsa in sede theatri / Karoleas acies et gallica gesta boantem / Cantorem aspicio*, in Foligno 1906–1907, 49; Mussato, *Epist.* 4.25–28 (see prev. footnote) and *De obsidione (præf.)*: *Et solere etiam iniquis amplissima regum ducumque gesta, quo se vulgi intelligentiis conferant, pedum syllabarumque mensuris variis linguis in vulgares traduci sermones, et in theatris et pulpitis cantilenarum modulatione proferri* (quoted in Witt 2000, 131–2, n. 41).

54 Various unannounced entrances of characters in Seneca are just as abrupt (see for example the *senex corinthius* in *Oed.* 784–85), but not so many follow each other in such a short section of the text. Moreover, Seneca's tragedies do not cover such a long time span (not even the *Octavia*, whose action covers a period of three days).

5 Nicholas Trevet Explains the Tragedies of Seneca

Just a few years after the composition of the *Ecerinis*, the study of Senecan tragedies received new impetus when the first commentary devoted to them began to circulate. Its author was Nicholas Trevet,⁵⁵ an English Dominican friar who had written it following a request by cardinal Niccolò Alberti da Prato (himself a Dominican), who had found Seneca's text obscure.⁵⁶ Such a request demonstrates how difficult it must have been for some cultivated readers of the time to approach the *Tragoediae*, although these texts were certainly well known to scholars with an interest in classical antiquity who frequented milieus like the papal court in Avignon.

We have no certain evidence that Trevet had come into contact with the circle of Paduan scholars interested in Seneca, or that he knew their contributions on the tragedies.⁵⁷ It does, however, appear clear that Trevet was not directly influenced by the studies that were slowly accumulating around the *corpus* of Seneca's tragedies in the wake of Lovato's observations.⁵⁸

Trevet's commentary is arranged in accordance with the typical scholastic methodology, the tragedies segmented through a systematic process of *divisio* into their constituent parts:⁵⁹ first of all into *actus*, which in turn are subdivided into *carmina*, the latter broken down into *partes*. Finally, the commentary describes each component of these *partes*. In this way, Trevet offers a detailed explanation of each line of the tragedy. Using a paraphrastic and literal approach intended to steer clear of any allegorical speculation, he

55 Born between 1265 and 1268, died in 1334. See Franceschini 1938b, 31–3 and 56–105, Junge 1999, 125–63, Fossati 2007a, xvi–lxiii, Brunetti 2013. On the manuscript tradition of the text of this commentary, see Palma 1977, xxv–xlv. For a survey of the many recent studies of Trevet's commentary on Seneca, see Fossati 2007b.

56 The letter containing the cardinal's request and Trevet's reply (already published by Peiper 1893, 159–60) have been edited by Franceschini 1938a, 1–4 and Franceschini 1938b, 29–30. On the relationship between the two men and their cultural background, see Dean 1948, Brunetti 2013, 356–61.

57 Dean 1948, 556 and 559–61, imagining the occasions when Nicholas Trevet might have met Niccolò Alberti also suggests he might have been in Padua in 1308, when the general chapter of the Dominicans was held in that city, but this is only speculation. Franceschini 1938b, 33 firmly denied any contact between Trevet and the Paduan milieu.

58 See Marchitelli 1999, 92.

59 See Franceschini 1938b, 39–43, Marchitelli 1999, 43–9, Junge 1999, 136–57 and Fossati 2007a, xxix–xlx.

illustrates mainly the text's linguistic aspects.⁶⁰ The work also includes information on a number of details regarding mythological, geographic, and astronomical features. Trevet's treatment of metrics, though derived largely from the same sources as Lovato's,⁶¹ becomes a convenient way of classifying and isolating the constituent parts of the individual plays. Metrics do not have the same importance for Trevet as they do for the Paduan humanists.

In general, Trevet views tragedy from the usual medieval perspective.⁶² He considers Seneca's dramas, whose ethical function he took for granted,⁶³ as exemplary illustrations of how the lives of the powerful are destined to Fortune's reversals. The cultural model on which he bases his conception of tragedy clearly emerges from a lengthy note found in his commentary on Boethius's *De consolazione philosophiae*, written at a time when Trevet apparently did not yet know Seneca's tragedies:⁶⁴

Cum [scil. Boethius] dicit Quid tragediarum, probat mutabilitatem Fortune divulgari quotidianis clamoribus, quia clamores poetarum quotidie in theatro recitantium tragedias nihil aliud continebant quam mutabilitatem Fortune. Et nota quod trageði dicuntur, secundum Ysydorum, Ethimologiarum libro 18, De ludo scenico, illi qui antiqua gesta atque facinora sceleratorum regum luctuoso carmine spectante populo concinebant. Unde tragedia est carmen de magnis criminibus vel iniquitatibus a prosperitate incipiens et in adversitatem terminans.⁶⁵

60 See Junge 1999, 135–36 and Lagioia 2008, xiv–xv. To get an idea of Trevet's approach to the text see the beginning of his commentary on *Thyestes*, with the explanation of the first two lines (I quote from Franceschini 1938a, 10): *Circa primum actum duo facit, quia primo agit de odio accenso inter fratres, secundo inducitur chorus plangens necquiciam stirpis Tantalidis, carmine secundo, ibi: Argos [= 122]. Circa primum duo facit. quia primo inducit Tantalum renitentem et Megeram urgentem alternatim, secundo Tantalum Megere parentem, ibi: Quid ora [= 96]. Prima habet quinque, quia primo inducitur Tantalus plangens ascensum suum de inferno et dicens: Quis furor me captantem, id est cum desiderio capere volentem, cibos fugaces ore avido, id est cupido.*

61 See Junge 1999, 161–62 and Fossati 2007a, xlv.

62 See Stäuble 1980, 50–54.

63 See Junge 1999, 132–34.

64 I quote from Kelly 1993, 128.

65 “When she says, ‘What does the clamoring of tragedies,’ she demonstrates that the mutability of Fortune is made common knowledge in daily clamorings; for the clamorings of poets reciting their tragedies every day in the theater contained nothing other than the mutability of Fortune. And note that according to Isidore, in book 18 of his *Etymologies*, in the chapter *On the Scenic Play*, tragedians are said to be those who sang of the old deeds and crimes of wicked kings in a doleful poem while the people looked on. Hence tragedy

Trevet adopts the same perspective in his commentary on the Senecan *corpus*. Of significance, for example, is a section from the general introduction in which he clarifies the difference between the writing of an author like Seneca and the inappropriately “tragic” writing of the epic.⁶⁶ Both epic and tragedy, in Trevet’s view, may deal with “tragic matter,” which, as usual, he identifies both in the *casus regum et magnorum virorum* and the *res publicae*. But the distinguishing feature of the *mos tragicus* is its *character dramaticus*, which does not allow within it the presence of a narrative voice separate from that of the characters. Consequently, according to Trevet, the authors of works like the *Aeneid*, the *Pharsalia*, or the *Metamorphoses*, though they dealt with *materia tragica*, may not be defined as *poete tragici*, unlike Seneca, who not only wrote about tragic matters, but also did so in the tragic mode (*non solum de materia tragica sed etiam scripsit more tragico*.) Trevet fully adopts the medieval conception of tragedy, without insisting on the formal aspects such as the choice of meters which Lovato and Mussato had identified as its distinguishing traits.

When Trevet refers to the “dramatic” dimension of tragic writing, he is obviously not talking about the theater. He pays a certain amount of attention to the dynamics of interactions between characters, but only with a view to clearly parsing the sequence of lines within various episodes of dialogue. As an example, I quote a passage from his commentary on *Thyestes* in which he illustrates how, in the prologue, the Fury instigates Tantalus to bring madness into the palace of the Pelopides:⁶⁷

Deinde cum dicit: Nunc o, inducitur Megera Tantalum precepta sua exequentem instruens, et est ymaginandum quod iam Tantalus vadit ad immittendum furorem in domum fratrum, scilicet Atrei et Thiesticis.⁶⁸

There are other similar passages in the commentary in which Trevet explains the way a character addresses his lines to various interlocutors or to himself.⁶⁹ An example is the comment to line 901 where Atreus invites his servants to

is a poem about great crimes or iniquities beginning in prosperity and ending in adversity,” trans. Kelly 1993.

66 In Franceschini, 1938a, 6–7 (see also 1938b, 35).

67 I quote from Franceschini 1938a, p. 16

68 “When later [the poet] says *Nunc o* [= 101], Megera is presented who gives instructions to Tantalus executing her orders, and we need to imagine that Tantalus has already left to spread madness in the house of the two brothers, in other words, Atreus and Thyestes.”

69 See for example the moment when, after describing the humble appearance of the brother who has arrived at the palace, Atreus addresses him in ll. 505–512 (I quote from Franceschini 1938a, 45–6): *et ut iram suam melius tegat, alloquendo se ipsum hortatur ut*

open the doors to reveal to the public (or to the readers) the figure of Thyestes intent on his final meal:

Et quasi ymaginando famulos presentes convertit ad eos sermonem, cum tamen per se loquatur; unde dicit: *turba famulans relaxa fores templi*.⁷⁰

From such passages, one can see that Trevet does not fully comprehend how the lines were to be declaimed in conjunction with the action on stage. The characters, for him, begin to speak only within the framework of a text intended for reading; Trevet, then, observes how the poet makes them speak on the page.

Trevet, although aware that these plays were destined for performance, envisages them according to the traditional interpretation mentioned above: a mimed accompaniment to a text that was meant to be declaimed. This view is confirmed in the one of his notes to the prologue of *Hercules furens*, which opens the Senecan *corpus*:⁷¹

Et nota quod tragedie et comedie solebant in theatro hoc modo recitari: theatrum erat area semicircularis, in cuius medio erat parva domuncula, que 'scena' dicebatur, in qua erat pulpitu super quod poeta carmina pronuntiabat; extra vero erant mimi, qui carminum pronuntiationem gestu corporis effigiabant per adaptationem ad quemlibet ex cuius persona loquebatur. Unde cum hoc primum carmen legebatur, mimus effigiabat Iunonem conquerentem et incitantem Furias infernales ad infestandum Herculem.⁷²

consideret cultum fratris inornatum [...] et convertens sermonem ad fratrem dicit: redde mihi complexus expetitos, id est desideratos.

70 "And as if he were imagining that his servants were present he addresses them, while in reality he is speaking to himself, and so he says: *turba famulans relaxa fores templi*." I quote from Franceschini 1938a, 74 (see also 76, on ll. 916–19). Commenting on the terrible moment when Atreus shows his brother the heads and hands of his sons (998–99), Trevet correctly illustrates the sequence of events but does not imagine what could be happening on stage.

71 I quote from Ussani 1959, 5–6. See also Kelly 1993, 133–34.

72 "Note that tragedies and comedies used to be recited in the theater in the following manner. The theater was a semicircular area in the middle of which was a small little house called the scene. In [or "on"] the scene was a pulpit, upon which the poet pronounced his poems. Outside the scene, however, were mimes who imitated the poet's speech by their bodily motions, adapting them to each character in whose person the poet was speaking. Hence, when the first poem [of *Hercules furens*] was being read, the mime would portray Juno complaining and calling upon the infernal Furies to set themselves upon Hercules," trans. Kelly 1993. See also the notes to lines 90 ff., in Ussani 1959, 24–27.

Still following the indications of Isidore of Seville, Trevet imagined the theatrical stage as a kind of small booth located in the middle of a semicircle in which the dramatic action took place. In this “scene” was the *pulpitum* upon which the poet stood. While he read his verses to the public, the actors represented the action, accompanying the recitation of the text with their gestures.⁷³

A famous miniature in a thirteenth-century Avignonese codex depicting the prologue to *Hercules furens* gives a good idea of the kind of scene Trevet had in mind.⁷⁴ The public (*populus expectans*) gathers around the semicircular space representing the theater area. At the center of the semicircle is the “scene” with the *pulpitum*, inside which the poet, perched on a lectern, reads from his codex. The characters are ranged on the upper half of the semicircle, with Hercules conspicuously in view. These are players engaged in miming what the poet is reading: in particular Juno who, with her gestures, incites the Furies below her to rise from the nether regions to the world above. The chorus, comprising three female figures alternating with three male figures, occupies the lower half of the semicircle. This is the only illustration of its kind among the illuminated fourteenth-century manuscripts of Seneca’s tragedies, where depictions of the various episodes of tragic myth (often based on inferences from Trevet’s own commentary) invariably make no reference to theatrical action.⁷⁵

6 Conclusions

When Seneca’s plays began to circulate in Europe again, readers, who still harbored a series of entrenched prejudices about ancient tragedy, received them with interest. Even figures like Trevet, who were knowledgeable enough about Senecan drama to undertake the task of explaining it to the scholarly

73 Another reference to the mimes may be found in the note to lines 895 ff. (in Ussani 1959, 128): *Inducuntur in hoc carmine quatuor persone, quas effigiabant quatuor mimi, scilicet Hercules, amicus Theseus, pater Amphitrion, uxor Megera*. Other traces of this medieval conception of ancient theater may be found in the *Expositio super librum Boecii de consolatione* 1.1, with regard to the *scenice meretricule*: see Kelly 1993, 127.

74 See Kelly 1993, 133–34. On the miniature see the entry by Carla Maria Monti in Buonocore 1996, 265–66 and figs. 187–88; Pietrini 2001, 234–35 and fig. 45; Brunetti 2013, 363–64. This image should be studied in relation to the oldest illustrations of the performances of Terence’s comedies (for which topic see Pietrini 2001, 211–17 and figs. 41–2).

75 See Monti and Pasut 1999 and 2013, Villa 2000, 470–71 and Fachechi 2010–2011. An illustration like this has no direct relationship with the theatrical technique employed by actors and pantomime dancers in antiquity (about the possible influence of pantomime on Senecan tragedy see Zanobi 2014).

community, viewed the world of tragic theater through the lens of a culture that for centuries had relied on fragmentary and incomplete information to imagine the entire genre of tragedy. This filter ultimately produced distorting effects. On the one hand, discussion of the plays' content atrophied to a reflection on the mutability of Fortune's favor. The destiny of the powerful was viewed in a negative light, and the implicit message was one of moderation and the avoidance of pride. On the other hand, the plays were more than anything considered as examples of a literary legacy from the distant past whose theatrical aspects remained obscure.

We should not underestimate the long lasting impact this "reading"—the result of a considerable amount of historical-cultural conditioning—had on the interpretation of ancient dramaturgy and the very conception of the tragic. It would be another couple of centuries before tragedy finally found its way onto the stage. In the meantime, very few experiments like Mussato's were attempted, and they were mostly confined to the context of scholastic production.⁷⁶

The return of tragedy to the theatrical stage did not occur until the sixteenth century in the context of the Italian courts. At that time, more extensive literary and antiquarian knowledge could be exploited, along with a greater accumulation of purely theatrical experiences, above all from the area of religious and festal celebrations.⁷⁷ In this new cultural climate Seneca's dramas continued to maintain a position of total preeminence: both during the phase of academic experimentations, such as the celebrated performance, in Latin, of *Hippolytus* in Rome (1486),⁷⁸ and during the full flowering of the form of courtly theater, beginning with the extraordinary success of *Orbecche* by Giovan Battista Giralaldi Cinthio (1541).⁷⁹ The very peculiar route taken by the tradition meant that Seneca's plays, whose text may never even have been performed, *became* (and for a long time remained) the paradigmatic model of classical tragedy for European culture.

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76 The most important are the *Achilles* by the Vicentine Antonio Loschi (written before 1390) and the *Progne* by the Venetian Gregorio Correr (1426–27); see Zaccaria, Casarsa 1981.

77 See Pieri 2006, 167–83.

78 See Dietrich 1957, 256–59, Cruciani 1983, 219–27.

79 On Giralaldi's Senecanism see Cremante 1988, 265–72.

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The Reception of Seneca in the Crowns of Aragon and Castile in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*

Tomàs Martínez Romero

1 Early Manuscript Reception

It is widely accepted that until the thirteenth century there is no evidence of any undeniably Iberian manuscript of Seneca's works. Prior to that time, none is linked to any kingdom of the Iberian Peninsula in terms of either its origin or its production.¹ This circumstance contrasts strongly with that of other European countries, where codices from the ninth century onwards can be found. If we limit the search to the reception of the *Tragoediae*, the panorama is even more desolate because their diffusion seems to have been slower and later² than that of Seneca's philosophical and moral works, such as *Epistulae ad Lucilium*, *De Clementia*, *De Beneficiis* and *Naturales Quaestiones* (Blüher 1983, 65). Medieval documents and inventories corroborate this and show that the presence of the *Tragoediae* in Hispanic territory expanded during the fourteenth century, especially in its second half. This tendency increased in a curve that continued to rise throughout the fifteenth century, mainly as a result of the translation of Senecan works into the various Romance languages of the

* It must be remembered that the union between Catalonia-Aragon and Castile did not take place until 1479 and that the fusion had therefore still not consolidated itself in the form of a larger entity, such as we know it today.

1 The first seems to be one of the *Epistulae ad Lucilium*, clearly recorded in the census carried out by Munk Olsen (cf. Brugnoli 1998, 91).

2 In fact, Emilio del Río (1995, 210) writes, "No ha existido en España un conocimiento y tradición de las tragedias de Séneca continuados desde los últimos años de la Edad Antigua hasta el siglo XIV" ("There was no continuous knowledge and tradition of Seneca's tragedies in Spain between the last years of Classical Antiquity and the fourteenth century"). Blüher (1983, 54, n. 128) mentions only three manuscripts containing works by Seneca that date from the thirteenth century and which have been conserved until today in Spain, all three of them kept in El Escorial. T-I11-11, with the tragedies, does not belong to the Spanish tradition and, moreover, other authors date it to the fourteenth century (MacGregor 1972, 1166).

Peninsula. We could say without much fear of being mistaken that the translations consolidated a process that had begun quite timidly at some earlier time. It is clear that cultural and socio-political connections—above all those of the Crown of Aragon—with France and with the papal court in Avignon established channels for the reception of manuscripts during the fourteenth century and favoured the entry of previously unknown works or authors. Indeed, this is the path taken by the *Tabulatio et expositio Senecae*, written in Latin by the Florentine Dominican Luca Mannelli in Avignon between 1347 and 1350, to the court of King Martí I († 1410) in Barcelona. It must be remembered that Nicholas Trevet, O.P., passed through Avignon a short time after writing his famous commentary on Seneca's tragedies (c. 1316), and that it was there where volumes with Trevet's glosses and annotations were copied, some of which appear on the inventory of the papal library in Peniscola, Benedict XIII's place of forced exile.³ This concentration of manuscripts during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in the Crowns of Aragon and Castile is still evident in the score of testimonies of the tragedies conserved in the libraries of these territories, a fifth of which contain Trevet's commentary (Rubio 1984; MacGregor 1972). It is clear that the commentaries on Seneca's works facilitated their reception by a broader group of readers, although the reading of the plays was not performed as in the theater until well into the sixteenth century.⁴

2 Medieval Catalan Translation and Its Reception

The diffusion of the Catalan translation of the *Tragèdies* was early and notable. It is a well-documented fact that the translation found its way into the homes of the Catalan-Aragonese Crown:⁵ it appeared on the record of the property of the Valencian Canon Pere d'Artés in 1440, and there is evidence that Domènec Cubells, from Morella, owned one volume in 1450. The title under which it appeared on the inventory of the doctor in law Ferrer Berard in 1494, *Travet, Sobre les Tragèdies de Sèneca*, leaves it quite clear that he, too, owned

3 Items 922 and 926 of the 1423 inventory are some *Tragedie Senece glossate* (Serrano-Perarnau 1987, 137), which can almost certainly be identified with Trevet's text. Many of the volumes on this inventory had been written in notably earlier periods.

4 One of the causes that can perhaps account for this delay is the fact that the translations carried out during the "manuscript period" were not printed (Blüher 1983, 321–22).

5 The summary by Ruiz (2004) offers an interesting introduction to the different medieval translations of Seneca's works into Castilian and Catalan.

a version of Trevet's commentary.⁶ The increased circulation of the Catalan text, although slightly later, runs parallel to that of the Latin, and exemplifies a well-known, gradual acquisition of cultural materials by the Bourgeois layers of society: what had previously been exclusive to royalty and nobles started to become popular among merchants, notaries, and ordinary citizens as the fifteenth century progressed.

The Catalan translation of the tragedies, though first attested in the inventories of 1440, probably dates from the late fourteenth to early fifteenth century. Material and verifiable evidence points toward those years: the manuscript of the Biblioteca del Palacio Real in Madrid, one of the six copies of the Catalan version that have been conserved, is from the early fifteenth century, and another, number twelve in the Biblioteca Capitulare of Barcelona, which is incomplete, dates to 1433 (according to a note written at the same time). On the other hand, the text of the tragedy *Medea* presented in this version is interpolated within the Catalan translation of *Histoire ancienne*, which seems to have been translated before 1419 (Martínez Romero 1998, 66–67). These data match the (unconfirmed) assertion that Antoni Vilaragut dedicated the Catalan version of the tragedies to Joan I, King of Aragon between 1387 and 1396.⁷

Of the tragedies attributed to Seneca, *Octavia* and *Hercules Oetaeus* are missing from the Catalan version, and *Agamemnon* only goes as far as verse 309. The others are complete.⁸ The translator faithfully follows the annotations by Trevet in *Hercules furens*, *Thebais*, *Hippolytus* and *Oedipus*, even in the constructions and in his summary of the plots of the ten tragedies (which serves as the introduction to the work as a whole). Conversely, *Thyestes*, *Troades* and *Medea* essentially follow Seneca's Latin with a few occasional notes that derive

6 See Martínez Romero (1995, 17) for further information about early documentation on the circulation of the Catalan tragedies.

7 The claim is based only on a note from the Madrid manuscript to which we have just referred, written by the Valencian notary José Mariano Ortiz in the second half of the eighteenth century, which says: "Tragedia de Hercules y Medea por Mn. Antoni Vilaragut al Rey dn Juan el 1" (Martínez Romero 1995, I, 15). Thus, apart from this note, which was written a long time after the events actually occurred and with aim of serving a series of interests, there is nothing to prove that Vilaragut was the translator or that it was necessarily written during Joan I's reign. What is more, there are two historical figures who went by the name of Antoni de Vilaragut, grandfather and grandson: Antoni de Vilaragut i Visconti (1336–1400), Joan I's *majordom*, and Antoni de Vilaragut i de Vilanova († 1446), cup-bearer to Alfons el Magnànim (Martínez Romero 1998, 59–62).

8 For the characterisation of the work by the Catalan translator, the reader is referred to the introductory study to the edition by Martínez Romero 1995, which reviews and expands on the information given by Round 1974–79 and by Martínez Romero 1992.

from Trevet and are perfectly integrated within the text, without the typical connectors used to link comments, which do appear in the other group.

The Latin model of the second group therefore differs from that of the first, as does the style used in the translation. In fact, in the first group, the translator understands the commentator better than he understands Seneca and stays quite close to the Latin text, perhaps due to a lack of skill and confidence in his own capabilities. *Thyestes*, *Troades*, and *Medea*, on the other hand, display the work of a more able hand: they are less indebted to Trevet and have a more elegant and pleasant style. One special case is that of *Agamemnon*, which maintains a close relationship both with the group of translated tragedies led by *Hercules furens*, in that it remains faithful to the Latin structures, and also with the *Thyestes* group, due to the fact that it uses what is essentially a Seneca-based text with a few fragments from Trevet's commentary. Furthermore, the contribution made by the English commentator fits perfectly into the work as a whole. In more than just a few instances, *Agamemnon* seems as though it were the work of a third translator (Martínez Romero 1995, 1: 70).

Joanot Martorell's novel *Tirant lo Blanc* (1460–1464) exemplifies the secondhand reception of Seneca's tragedies through translation. Martorell draws heavily upon the Catalan—not the Latin—version of Seneca's tragedies, but does not make significant use of Seneca's Stoic vision of the world (Martínez Romero 1998, 155–98). He typically borrows phrases or complete sentences word for word from the Catalan translation and redeploys them within his own narrative, often endowing them with rhetorical and thematic emphases strategically suited to the new context. Martorell's sprinklings of Senecan excerpts in *Tirant*, occasionally juxtaposed with extracts from other works, are not always judicious, though. Nonetheless, Martorell's practice is possible only after a self-serving reading of the tragedies, because Seneca is present throughout nearly all the 487 chapters of *Tirant*. Current research confirms that Martorell had read at least the Catalan version of *Troades*, *Medea*, *Thyestes*, and *Agamemnon*, and was probably able to sporadically reuse materials from the other tragedies.

In addition to Martorell's pervasive direct appropriations from the Catalan translation, he also draws on Seneca more subtly to establish broad situational and thematic parallels between *Tirant* and the tragedies. For example, Martorell frames the novel through allusion to *Troades*. In the first chapters of *Tirant*, when the Count of Varoic's departure grieves his wife, Martorell takes the Catalan *Troades* as the model for the Countess's sorrow, equating her misery with that evoked by the fall of Troy and thus establishing the mournful thread maintained throughout the tale. The tragic remarks of Princess Carmesina and her father, the Emperor, following the death of the eponymous Tirant lo Blanc

in chapters 474–77 again evoke *Troades*.⁹ The allusion is apparent and understandable, thanks both to the discursive function of the characters involved and to the medieval identification between tragedy and *planh* (funeral lament, Pujol 2002, 203 and 211).

3 Seneca's Tragedies in Medieval Catalan Literature: Key Examples

A contemporary Valencian writer, the great poet Ausiàs March (1400–1459) is indebted to Seneca more on account of questions of style or the use of given motifs than on account of direct borrowings or citations. This is not to say that March never appropriates a key phrase. For example, “Quins tan segurs consells vas encerquant,/ cor malastruch, enfastijat de viure?” (“What sure counsel do you seek / Wretched heart, sick of life?” Bohigas 2005, 11.1–2) echoes “Coratge pereós, quins segurs consells vas cerquant?” from the Catalan *Agamemnon* (“Courage lost, what sure counsel do you seek?” Martínez Romero 1995, 2:457).¹⁰ Apart from sporadic cases like this one, March uses the dramatic Seneca more as a “escola d'estil” (“school of style”) and “pedrera de recursos i de motius” (“pool of resources and of motifs,” Badia 1993, 196–97), and thus his use of the tragedies differs from Martorell's. On the basis of linguistic, rhetorical, and thematic elements from *Hercules furens*, *Thyestes*, *Phaedra*, and *Agamemnon*, March is capable of offering us his own personal poetic projection in a series of verses that are full of tension, hyperbole, contrast, and feeling driven to the extreme.¹¹ What March often seeks in Seneca is the rhetoric of tragedy in the sense that Bohigas (1982, 202) defines it: words capable of evoking the suffering of a man subjected to the most extreme conflicts. Nevertheless, although the appropriation of thought is not systematic or contextualised in accordance with a coherent philosophy, it would not be fair to ignore the poet's engagement with Stoicism and Seneca's philosophical thinking. Even though their main source is the *Epistulae ad Lucilium* rather than the *Tragoediae*, March uses the aspects of Senecan Stoicism that can be Christianized (virtuous life, contempt of the world, dispensability of fame and honors, etc.).

9 *Medea*, moreover, also provides elements Martorell reuses in the moments of conflict between Tirant and his beloved Carmesina.

10 *Agamemnon* 108: *Quid, segnīs anime, tuta consilia expetis?*

11 The rhetorical nature of the tragedies, the effusiveness of feelings and the combination of contrasting elements was already highly valued by readers in the fourteenth century (Giardina 1999).

Another Valencian writer, Joan Roís de Corella (1435–1497), makes broader use of the tragedies in his mythological prose. In these writings, the author develops myths that have been extracted from the works of Ovid because they suit his moral purpose. Accordingly, characters who pursue passionate love to unhappy endings serve as negative examples. Within this context, our author introduces elements of the style, dramatization, and verbalisation of the feelings offered by Seneca's tragedies in Latin, resulting in a magnificent explosion of sentiments and affection (Badia 1988, 175). In addition, Roís de Corella connects his arguments and characters to others from Seneca by the use of common thematic elements, and then builds upon this relational base by reusing material from the Latin writer.¹² The description of the macabre banquet, for example, enables him to link the myth of Tereus (the last to appear in the *Parlament en casa de Berenguer Mercader*) to Seneca's *Thyestes*. Something similar happens with Seneca's *Medea* and this same myth of Tereus, but this time based on the common outcomes for the male characters, Tereus and Jason. What is more, Corella's *Medea* and Seneca's *Medea* share the motif of the deserved death of the female character, a sentence that is exchanged for exile thanks to Jason's intervention.

In addition to the great importance of the characters and of their activities in Corella's work, the author makes use of genre-characterising elements or general lines of argument from *Seneca tragicus*. This is what we find in *Plant de la reina Hècuba*, which contains speeches and lamentations by the queen that are dependent on the *Troades*, above all in the first and fourth acts. Moreover, the autobiographical confession is what allows Corella to take Seneca's *Medea* into account in this same *Plant*.

The royal secretary Bernat Metge (c. 1350–1413) cannot be omitted from any study of the presence of classical authors in medieval Catalan literature. In *Lo somni*, his most important work, this well-read and cultured writer provides the reader with evidence of his insightful reading of *Hercules furens*, *Troades*, and *Phaedra*, and almost certainly *Agamemnon*, *Hercules Oetaeus*, *Oedipus*, *Thyestes*, and *Medea* (Cingolani 2006, 34). The only works that would not be included in this repertoire would therefore be *Octavia* and *Phoenissae*. Probably the most visible and obvious mark of Seneca's influence in this work is to be found in the description of hell provided by the character Orpheus, in the third book, which is a passage that is clearly indebted to *Hercules furens* 650–825 (Badia 1991–92).¹³ Together with Seneca, who provides the core elements, the

¹² In this subsection, I follow the analyses by Badia 1988 and Martos 2005.

¹³ Other secondary sources used in those pages include elements from Seneca's *Oedipus*, *Medea* and *Thyestes*, amongst others (Cingolani 2006, 83).

other main sources are Virgil's *Aeneid* and Dante's *Commedia*. Furthermore, what Metge tells us about the life and stories of the two fundamental characters of this third book of *Lo somni*, Orpheus (3.2) and Tiresias (3.5), relies to a greater or lesser extent (together with other sources) on Seneca's tragedies, especially *Oedipus* for Tiresias; and *Hercules furens* (with Trevet's commentaries), *Agamemnon*, and *Hercules Oetaeus* for Orpheus (Cingolani 2006, 79; 90). For instance, in the following excerpt from the third book of *Lo somni*, Orpheus's description of the power of his voice resonates with passages from *Hercules furens*¹⁴ and *Hercules Oetaeus*:¹⁵

En lo dit munt no havie ombra alcuna, mas tantost n'i hagué, per gran multitud d'arbres de diverses natures, roques, pedres, serps, çervos, lehons, falcons, àguiles, perdius, faysans e altres moltes bèsties e oçells qui vengren hoir lo plasent so que jo fahia. (Ed. Cingolani 2006, 188)¹⁶

This is yet another example of Metge's knowledge and capacity to reuse previous readings, as well as the good reception of Seneca's tragedies by the Catalan-Aragonese Crown towards the end of the fourteenth century.

4 The Spanish Translation and Its Models

There are two Spanish versions of the tragedies, both from the first half of the fifteenth century, although written independently of each other. One contains an abridged text and the other is far more complete. Nevertheless, they both rely on the medieval Catalan translation that we already know (Round 1974–77; Martínez Romero, in preparation). Some of the Spanish testimonies that transmit it, however, present materials that are absent from the Catalan text, including a summary of *Hercules Oetaeus* and a part of *Octavia* (until verse 817). Round assumes—and I fully agree—that the translator of the most complete Spanish version worked with a Catalan model (or models) that already contained these additions. The latest research (Grespi 2005) agrees that the

14 Cf. especially 572–74: *Quae siluas et aues saxaque traxerat / ars, quae prae buerat fluminibus moras, / ad cuius sonitum constiterant ferae.*

15 Especially 1054–1059: *ad cantus ueniunt suis / ipsae cum latebris ferae; / iuxtaque in pauidum pecus / sedit Marmaricus leo / nec dammae trepidant lupos / et serpens latebras fugit.*

16 “On the above mentioned mountain there was no shade to be seen, but that was soon to change for the delightful sound I made attracted a number of trees of different kinds, rocks, snakes, deer, hawks, eagles, partridges, pheasants and other beasts and birds.”

Spanish text is faithful to the Catalan and has no direct links with the Latin: a conclusion borne out by the large number of Catalanisms in the Spanish text. This evidence suggests that the original Catalan text contained at least part of *Octavia* and the summary of *Hercules Oetaeus* (Martínez Romero 1995, 1:37).

Whether the extant Spanish translation—abridged or more complete—is the one undertaken on the Marquis de Santillana's initiative is a question raised over one hundred years ago that remains unsettled and controversial. In a well-known letter written to his son, Don Pero González, who was then a student at Salamanca (prior to 1452), Santillana says how proud he is to have sponsored the translation of three classics, including one by Seneca (Gómez Moreno and Kerkhof [G.M. and K.] 1988, 456–57):

A ruego e instançia mía, primero que de otro alguno, se han vulgarizado en este reyno algunos poetas, assí como la *Eneida* de Virgilio, el *Libro mayor de las transformaciones* de Ovidio, las *Tragedias* de Lucio Anio Séneca e muchas otras cosas en que yo me he deleytado fasta este tiempo e me deleyto y son assí como un singular reposo a las vexaçiones y trabajos que el mundo continuamente trae, mayormente en estos nuestros reynos.¹⁷

There have been opinions both in favour of and against identifying the longest version of the medieval Spanish translation with that commissioned by the Marquis.¹⁸ Schiff (1905, 111–12) rejected this possibility, stating that Santillana must have known that the tragedies were not nine, as stated in that version. Round (1974–1979, 191), on the other hand, refuted this claim by pointing out that the prologue states quite explicitly that there are ten tragedies; moreover, the letter to Doña Violante de Prades, which serves as the preface to Santillana's *Comedieta de Ponça*, contains a definition of tragedy that can be found in the pages of both the Spanish and Catalan versions, which are ultimately indebted to Trevet's annotations, although, as we shall see, this is not the only possible source. Nevertheless, opposed to attributing this translation to the Marquis's initiative, Round highlighted the fact that there is no de

17 “Thanks to my initiative, which precedes any other, in this kingdom some poets have been translated, such as the *Aeneid* by Virgil, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the *Tragoediae* by Lucius Annaeus Seneca together with many other things that have delighted me and continue to do so, for they are like a unique respite from the offences and toils the world unceasingly brings upon us, especially in these our kingdoms.”

18 G.M. and K. (1988, xxvii and lxxi) declare themselves to be in favor, because it is the simplest solution. No one except Round takes the abridged version into account.

rigueur prologue-dedication, which a work sponsored by such an important figure had to include. Round further deduced that, although there is insufficient evidence to determine whether the Santillana version was lost or is to be identified with the extant translation,¹⁹ the surviving Spanish text certainly derives from the Catalan.

Another detail that has largely gone unnoticed is that, as far as we know, the greatest and best translator of Seneca into Spanish (between 1430–34), Alonso de Cartagena (c. 1384–1456), had no intention of producing a new version of the tragedies or of writing anything more than glosses on select passages.²⁰ Such glosses and critical notes facilitated the reader's assimilation of Seneca's writing. Cartagena's more practical and moral aims while dealing with Seneca may have exerted a decisive influence and determined his choice of works. For Cartagena, the tragedies did not offer any direct authority or doctrine, as he makes explicit in a gloss to *De providentia* 1.13, where he states: "E commo en otro lugar dixe las tragedias no han auctoridad de doctrina por quanto Séneca habla en ellas so nonbre de otros," ("As I have said elsewhere, the tragedies cannot be considered doctrine because Seneca speaks through the voices of his characters," Río 1995, 240). Cartagena preferred the direct voice of the philosopher rather than the intermediate one of his characters, which necessarily required an exegetical comment or a relevant gloss to be able to clearly reflect the moral and ethical applications they supposedly expressed.

5 Select Spanish Writers and Seneca's *Tragoediae*

The reception of Seneca's works among the Spanish readership, and more particularly among writers, has a number of points in common with what happened in the Catalan-Aragonese Crown, but also has its own distinctive features. In fact, it has often been pointed out that, generally speaking, Seneca's influence across the whole of the Iberian Peninsula was more circumstantial and partial than systematic. Yet, as claimed by one of the most knowledgeable scholars on the subject of the Iberian Seneca, Karl Alfred Blüher (1983, 166), we would be hard pressed to find an author from the fifteenth century who has not,

19 It must be remembered that in 1702 a fire partly destroyed the stock of books that the Marquis kept in Guadalajara. The translation of the tragedies may have been there at that time.

20 Indeed, in the "Tractado de las mugeres" Alonso de Cartagena adds a note on Hippolytus's intervention against the women of *Phae*. 554–565 (Río 1995, 268).

at one time or another, resorted to some of Seneca's thoughts. Nevertheless, we will not always be able to pinpoint the exact origin of the source and its scope: that is, which page or pages exert an influence, whether they do so directly or indirectly, and what function they carry out within the receiving work as a whole. Sometimes the reception of Seneca is secondhand, through an intermediary or intermediaries, while on other occasions the expression, the rhetorical component, or the coincidence between plots stimulates our interest. Finally, in just a few cases, Stoicism appears as a coherent philosophical system rather than as fragmentary sentences or topics (such as suicide, fate, the wise man's position, etc.), as more often occurs.

We have spoken earlier about Íñigo López de Mendoza, Marquis of Santillana (1398–1458). Santillana cites the name of Seneca several times throughout his known works. He also speaks of him, for example, in *Defunción de Don Enrrique de Villena* (153–55): “Perdimos a Libio e al Mantuano,/ Macrobio, Valerio, Salustio e Magneo;/ pues non olvidemos al moral Eneo,” (“We lost Livy and the Mantuan [Virgil],/ Macrobius, Valerius, Sallust and Magnentius [Lucan];/ but let's not forget moral Anneus [Seneca],” G.M. and K. 1988, 162). He does so again, in *Proverbios*, now with a more explicit reference to the letters sent to Lucilius: “las ymágenes de aquéllos o de los tales -assí como dize Séneca en una epístola suya a Luçilio- siempre deven ser ante vuestros ojos,” (“the images of those or others that resemble them—as Seneca says in one letter to Lucilius—shall ever be kept before your eyes,” G.M. and K. 1988, 218). It is not surprising that in both cases he refers to Seneca as writer of dialogues or epistles; in fact, the moral Seneca is more present in his work than most critical studies indicate. Even by the fifteenth century, the *moralitates* captivated readers and were disseminated more broadly than the tragedies.²¹ Accordingly, Seneca's tragedies can only intuitively be identified in the Marquis's compositions.²² In addition, the volumes that hypothetically

21 Consider, for example, this statement by the Marquis in a letter to his nephew Pero de Mendoza about the *Epistulae ad Lucilium*: “quanto a moralidad, dexando las cosas de Sacra Escritura, ciertamente vos non podedes estudiar ninguna mejor cosa nin de mayor utilidade a la vida presente” (“With regard to morality, and leaving the Sacred Scriptures aside, there is nothing you can study that will be better or more useful for this life,” Gómez Moreno and Kerkhof 1988, 458). The famous verses by Fernán Pérez de Guzmán run in this same direction: “más fructificó en los mores/ Séneca con obra llana,/ que no la virgili-ana/ Eneyda con sus dulçores,” (“Regarding customs, Seneca used a plain work more to the readers' advantage than Virgil's *Aeneid* with all its charm”).

22 Crosas (2010, 130) calculated that Santillana's compositions in verse contained a total of 1239 motifs from the Greek-Latin material. Yet it seems that the Marquis's main sources of mythological material are Ovid, Virgil and Boccaccio (Río 1995, 159).

existed in his library, recorded in a well-known monograph by Schiff (1905, 102–20), do little to help us determine which works were actually read by Santillana, since there are many problems involved in authenticating the different materials by Seneca (in Latin, in Italian, in Spanish) that were initially included within it.²³ As regards the only recorded tragedies, there are some doubts as to whether what is currently catalogued as Res. 230 in the Biblioteca Nacional de Madrid, a volume written in Italian, was actually in the Marquis's library; conversely, however, the Spanish tragedies sponsored by the Marquis himself, of which no copies seem to have survived to the present day, were presumably available to him.

What is beyond doubt is that Santillana's conception of tragedy as "the downfall of the great," which he articulates in his delineation of the three genres (tragedy, comedy and satire),²⁴ was common in the Middle Ages:

Tragedia es aquella que contiene en sí caídas de grandes reys e príncipes, así como de Ércoles, Príamo e Agamenón e otros tales, cuyos nascimien-tos e vidas alegremente se començaron e grande tienpo se continuaron e después tristemente cayeron. E de fablar d'estos usó Séneca el mançebo, sobrino del otro Séneca, en las sus tragedias, e Iohan Bocaçio en el libro *De casibus virorum illustrium*. (Quoted in G.M. and K. 1988, 436)²⁵

23 Today there is widespread agreement among critics when it comes to stating that, in his study on the Marquis's library, Schiff was too generous. G.M. and K. (1988, xxv), for example, states, "sólo le perteneció con seguridad uno de los señalados por Schiff, que contiene las *Epistolae* y *De Providentia Dei* en italiano (BNM, Res. 7)," ("only one of those pointed out by Schiff could be attributed to him beyond any shadow of a doubt, which contain the *Epistolae* and *De Providentia* in Italian (BNM, Res. 7)").

24 G.M. and K. 1988, lxviii. Round (1974–79, 190–93) dates the version of the tragedies sponsored by Santillana to sometime between 1436, when the *Comedieta de Ponça* was begun, and 1452, when he writes the letter to his son telling him that he has commissioned the translation of the tragedies. The first date is set based upon the belief that the definition of tragedy included in the *Comedieta* is drawn directly from the translation of the tragedies, without taking into account any other possible authorship and neglecting the fact that it also speaks of comedy and satire.

25 "A tragedy is that which deals with the fall of great kings and princes, such as Hercules, Príam, Agamemnon or others similar to these, whose birth and life started joyfully, continued for some time, and then sadly declined. Seneca the Younger, Seneca's nephew, spoke of them in his tragedies, as did Boccaccio in his book *De casibus virorum illustrium*." Letter to Doña Violante de Prades which serves as the letter-prologue to *Comedieta de Ponça* (1443 or 1444). The mistaken use of "nephew" ("sobrino") instead of "son" does not make the Marquis's quote any less interesting, as he already follows the

A similar definition of the tragic genre appears in *La coronación del marqués de Santillana* ("second preamble"), by Juan de Mena,²⁶ and Miguel Ángel Pérez Priego has traced its source to the Italian commentators on the works of Dante, above all Benvenuto da Imola (Pérez Priego 1989, xvii and xxiv). For Santillana and his contemporaries, then, tragedy had to deal with great misfortunes and depict a downward progression from prosperity to adversity.

No matter what path Santillana chose to reach his idea of tragedy, and with his deserved recognition for promoting Spanish translations of Seneca, it must be clearly stated that the mark of the tragedies is an unquestionable fact in very few instances. However, Rafael Lapesa (Lapesa 1957, 147; López Bascuñana 1977, 229) detects in *Comedieta de Ponça* some possible (although perhaps too general) thematic influences of *Phaedra* and *Octavia* in strophes sixteen and seventeen, which are headed by a very explicit "Benditos aquellos...", combined with the more than obvious influence of Horace (vv. 121–128; ed. G.M. and K. 1988, 167):

¡Benditos aquellos que con el açada
sustentan su vida e biven contentos
e, de quando en quando, conosçen morada
e suffren pasçientes las lluvias e vientos!
Ca éstos non temen los sus movimientos,
nin saben las cosas del tienpo passado,
nin de las presentes se fazen cuydado,
nin las venideras do han nascimientos.²⁷

Compare the above with the following verses from Seneca's *Phaedra* (1124–1125, 1138–1140):

Italian humanists in distinguishing between the tragic and the moral Seneca (Blüher 1983, 250).

26 "Tragedia es dicha la escritura que fabla de altos fechos, e por bravo e sobervio e alto estilo, la qual manera siguieron Omero, Vergilio, Lucano, Estaçio; por la tragedia escritura, puesto que comienza en altos principios, su manera es acabar en tristes e desastrados fines," ("The tragedy is the one that speaks of great acts in a haughty and exalted style, like the one used earlier by Homer, Virgil, Lucano, Statius; as it begins with exalted beginnings, it finishes with sad and disastrous endings," Pérez Priego 1989, 107).

27 "God bless those who sustain their life working with a hoe and live happily and sometimes find haven and patiently endure the rains and the winds! For they do not fear their movements, nor do they know about the things of the past, or worry about those of present or of the future."

Minor in paruis Fortuna furit
 leuisque ferit leuiora deus;
 seruat placidos obscura quies
 praebetque senes casa securos. [...]
 non capit umquam magnos motus
 humilis tecti plebeia domus,
 circa regna tonat.²⁸

In the same work, when Santillana refers to the simple life, there are, perhaps, reminiscences from the well-known passage in *Phaedra* (483–564) on the same motif. The possibility that the Hippolytus of Seneca's *Phaedra* served as model for Santillana's Hippolytus in *El infierno de los enamorados* is a much vaguer proposition (Río 1995, 259–60).

In the work by Íñigo López de Mendoza, the tragic Seneca loses ground to the moral Seneca. In fact, a clear chronological progression appears in the Marquis that goes from what are initially but a few sporadic mentions to more numerous uses of Seneca's moral pages (Lapesa 1957, 175; López Bascuñana 1977, 238). This use of Senecan Stoicism becomes more apparent in *Bías contra Fortuna* (1448),²⁹ the ultimate purpose of which was to be used by Santillana to console his cousin, the Count of Alba, who was imprisoned by Don Alvaro de Luna. The formulation presented by Santillana on this occasion is a debate between Fortuna and the Greek scholar Bías, a character that he had taken from the Spanish version of *Liber de vita et moribus philosophorum* by Walter Burley, which portrays the Stoic ideal of one who remains intact despite external contingencies (Reichenberger 1969, 25). *Bías contra Fortuna* goes beyond the simple reuse of sentences to offer an interpretation of Seneca in line with the ideological and cultural interests represented by men like Santillana (Delgado 1994, 428).³⁰

Juan de Mena (1411–1456), who studied the Arts at Salamanca, worked as Juan II's royal secretary, and translated the *Ilias latina*, is undoubtedly the

28 Cf. *Octavia* 895–898: Bene paupertas / humili tecto contenta latet: / quatiunt altas saepe procellae / aut euerit Fortuna domos.

29 Lapesa writes, "No fifteenth-century Spanish poem offered such a striking and complete display of Stoic morale. Santillana takes it directly from Seneca" (Lapesa 1957, 217). It should be noted, however, that it is a display of Stoic morale according to the parameters of medieval reception.

30 Alonso (1985) calls attention to the following ideas in *Bías* that are incompatible with Christianity: virtue as a supreme asset of mankind (when it is in fact a means); the victory of the wise man over fortune (victory that can only be allowed by God); or indifference in the face of adversities and external possessions.

medieval author writing in Spanish whose works contain the most classical material (Crosas 2010, 135). If we take heed of the reference studies on Mena, then the tragedies are the work by Seneca of which our author makes the greatest use (Lida 1950, 123 et passim).³¹ There are influences of *Phaedra*, *Octavia* and *Hercules Oetaeus* in *Coplas contra los pecados mortales* (Blüher 1983, 184), which follows the tradition of allegorical debates, and some minor but explicit references in *La coronación*. These latter are, however, very general and sometimes even just ornamental.³² For example, at the point where he sums up the story of Jason and Medea, Mena vaguely states the source as lying in Seneca: “segund más largo lo pone Séneca en la tragedia intitulada de Medea e Ovidio en el registro del otavo libro *Metamorfoseos* que comienza ‘Iamque fertur’” (“as Seneca wrote at greater length in his tragedy *Medea* and Ovid in the eighth book of his *Metamorphoses* which begins: ‘Iamque fertur,’” Pérez Priego 1989, 125).³³ And elsewhere, when speaking of Scylla and Charybdis, he comments: “Otrosí escribe Séneca destos peligros en la tragedia de *Medea*” (“Furthermore, Seneca wrote about these dangers in the tragedy *Medea*,” Pérez Priego 1989, 159). What is beyond doubt, however, is the moral interpretation that Mena makes of it: “Por Jasón podemos entender qualquiera que anda por la semejante manera engañando el mundo con el ardor de la luxuria dando fee a muchas e non la teniendo con ninguna” (“By Jason we can understand anyone that lives in a similar way, deceiving the world with the zeal of lust giving faith to many and not having it with any,” Pérez Priego 1989, 125).

In addition, in the commentary to “stanza” thirty-seven of his *La coronación del marqués de Santillana*, Mena lists what was known about the Latin writer in the Middle Ages (Pérez Priego 1989, 189–90):

31 In the same way, the references to the moral Seneca are clear and explicit, for example in the prologue to *Iliada en romance*: “Como si dixésemos de Séneca el moral, . . .” (“As if we talked about Seneca as being moral . . .”).

32 It is also true that at other times it works in the same way and with respect to other authors that are assured sources of Mena’s literature: “Fasta aquí va en parte fabloso e parabólico e estórico, segund quiso escribir Ovidio de quando Juno desçendía a los infiernos, . . . e Séneca de quando Teseo desçendió allá” (“So far I have commented on it in a historical, fabulous and parabolical way, as Ovid intended to do when he wrote about Juno’s descent into Hades . . . and Seneca too, when he dealt with Theseus’s descent,” *La coronación*; Pérez Priego 1989, 141).

33 And at yet another point: “del qual carnero fue despojado el dorado velloçino que Jassón ganó, segund por Ovidio es mençionado . . . e por Séneca en la tragedia de *Medea*,” (“The Golden Fleece that Jason won was taken from this ram, as Ovid said . . . and Seneca too in his tragedy *Medea*,” *La coronación*; Pérez Priego 1989, 115).

Séneca vandaliano: conviene a saber andaluz...del qual escribe Gerónimo en el libro intitulado *Illustrium virorum*... Deste alto filósofo los libros que fallo qu'él ordenó son los que se siguen: las *Epístolas* de Séneca a Sant Pablo e veinte e dos libros de las *Epístolas* que fizo a Luçilio... otro libro que fizo de las doze *Tragedias*, otro libro *De ludo claudi*, otro libro *De paupertate*, otro libro contra superstiçiones, aqueste libro yo nunca vi pero Sant Agustín en el sexto libro *De civitate Dei* muchas vezes lo allega.³⁴

Saint Jerome's bibliographical reference to Seneca could not be overlooked. But perhaps the most interesting part of the quote is the list of Seneca's works it offers, which comes directly from the prologue of *Tabulatio et expositio Senecae* by Luca Mannelli (Olivetto 2010, 325–26). In fact, this was where he found the reference (which had already been reported by Aulus Gellius) to the twenty-two books of the *Epistulae ad Lucilium*, instead of the twenty that appear in the canonical text of this work. Mannelli does not report the number of tragedies as being “twelve,” which leads one to suppose that a mistake occurred while Mena's text was being copied.³⁵

The reception of the tragic Seneca in Spanish-speaking territory is obviously not limited to Santillana and Mena. In 1424 Enrique de Villena (1384–1434) wrote *Tratado de consolación* for his friend Juan Fernández de Valera, who was stricken with grief following the death of his family due to the plague. In this work Villena intentionally employs *Troades* and *Thyestes* to reflect on death and to depict Thyestes as a model of a man toughened by adversity (Río 1995, 277–280). Thus, Thyestes is to serve as a positive example to Valera. The mark of the tragic Seneca seems more obvious in the better-known passages of Enrique de Villena, in *Los dotze treballs d'Hèrcules* / *Los doze trabajos de Hércules*. First written in Catalan³⁶ and later translated into Spanish (ed. Morreale 1958), it maintains a long tradition of manuscripts in the latter language and enjoyed

34 “The *vandaliano*, that is to say, Andalusian Seneca...whom Jerome wrote about in his book *Illustrium virorum*... The books by Seneca that I know of are: *The letters to Saint Paul*, 22 books containing the letters he wrote to Lucilius, a book with the twelve *Tragedies*, a book entitled *De ludo claudi*, one called *De paupertate* and another book against superstitions (I have never seen it but Saint Augustine often refers to it in the sixth book of *De civitate Dei*).”

35 Olivetto (2010, 325, n. 21) reflects upon this same point about the vicissitudes of the transmission of Mena's work in manuscripts.

36 As the author himself points out, the writing of the original Catalan work was finished in April 1417. Only a later edition of this text, printed in Valencia by Cofman in 1514, has been conserved. Some fragments can be read in Catedra-Cherchi 2007.

great popularity during the fifteenth century. While Villena engages with both *Hercules furens* and *Hercules Oetaeus*, he endows the figure of Hercules with a shade of moral, Christian-tinged exemplarity and removes any potential dramatic element from the story. Villena understands his work as more of as satire rather than tragedy (Morreale 1958, xxxi) because, all things considered, throughout the exegetical comments the writer seems bent on telling us how the facts are to be read rather than on showing us how they took place. The following is a magnificent example, taken from chapter 12, in which Villena explicitly refers to *Hercules Oetaeus* 1989–1996, and especially to the phrase *domitor magne ferarum / orbisque simul pacator* (Morreale 1958, 133):

Otros entienden que esto [*los doze trabajos*] espiritualmente entender se deve tomando por ercules dios que es domador de todos viçios e de todas bestiales costunbres. Asi paresçe que lo diga seneca en la fin de la su postrimera tragedia, invocando a dios que cate a los omnes del mundo e tuelga los viçios, llamandolo en aquel lugar domador de las fieras e alle-gandole los erculinos trabajos.³⁷

Thanks to the studies by Paolo Cherchi (Cátedra-Cherchi 2007, 115–131) we know that one section of Guido da Pisa's *Istoria fiorita*—the one dedicated to Hercules—was the source for Villena's composition.³⁸ In fact, the passage quoted above depends upon this Italian intermediary (Cátedra-Cherchi 2007, 129):

Seneca nell'ultimo libro delle sue tragedie pare che metta che li fatti d'Ercole siano figure divine, cioè che tengano figura di Dio; onde sotto il nome d'Ercole chiamando a Dio dice: o tu domatore delle fiere salvatiche e pacificatore del mondo, poni mente qua giù in terra, e, se alcuna bestia, cioè tiranno conturba li popoli, con le tue saette abbattigli.³⁹

37 “Others think that this [The Twelve Labors] must be understood in a spiritual way, taking Hercules as God, who is the tamer of every vice and every beastly custom. That is what Seneca seems to be saying at the end of his last tragedy, praying to God to come and examine men and to exterminate their vices, calling him the tamer of the beasts and citing the labors of Hercules.”

38 It is known that for each of the twelve labours Villena proposes four levels of interpretation: the historical-narrative interpretation of the myth, the allegorical, the euhemeristic, and finally the ethical-political application, which is the one that is not dependent in any way on Guido da Pisa .

39 “In the last book of his tragedies, Seneca seems to think that the acts of Hercules are divine figures, that is to say, that they are the image of God; that is why, under the name of

The same moral and philosophical capacities of tragedies were undoubtedly highly valued by figures such as Fray Martín de Córdoba in his *Compendio de la fortuna* (Rubio 1968, 557–564). It is clear that Córdoba, like other medieval writers and readers, reflected upon topics that were both present in the works of Seneca and also part of the concerns of his own time: the blindness and instability of fortune, which offers two different faces, and the restraint and equanimity of the poor, for example, are commonplaces that occur regularly from the late fourteenth century onwards. In Fray Martín's reformulation of these *topoi* in the *Compendio*, he took advantage of the good reception of the tragedies, and more particularly *Thyestes*, *Hercules furens*, *Phaedra* and *Octavia* (Rubio 1968, 562–64). It should be said that *Hercules furens* (vv. 737–740, 745–747) was also well used by the friar in his *Jardín de nobles donzellas*, specifically in Theseus's exhortation to the kings and warlords to urge them to avoid cruelty and the spilling of blood (Rubio 1968, 565–66).

In addition to the moral, thematic, and ornamental uses of the tragedies, they also served as a kind of encyclopedia from which to extract mythological information. This is what Alonso Fernández de Madrigal, *el Tostado* (c. 1410–1455), did in his *Questiones sobre los dioses de los gentiles*, which could be considered the first important work on mythology in Spanish. Madrigal's main sources were the tragic Seneca and Boccaccio; likewise, albeit to a lesser extent, he drew on Saint Isidore, Saint Augustine, Virgil, Ovid, Cicero, and Eusebius (Saquero-González 1985). It is interesting to note that Madrigal gave priority to the euhemeristic and physical, rather than the allegorical, interpretations of the pagan gods. Fernández de Madrigal's mythological reference testifies to the good and varied welcome that the *Tragoediae* enjoyed in Hispanic territory.

A summary of the reception of Seneca's tragedies in fifteenth-century Spanish literature would not be complete without some reference to *La Celestina*. It is known that in the *Comedia*, that is to say in the first edition of the work (1499), there are powerful signs of the moral Seneca, essentially from *Epistulae ad Lucilium* and from *Proverbia Senecae* (Blüher 1983, 161–64). This panorama changed substantially some years later when, with the incorporation of additions and interventions, the work appeared under the name of *Tragicomedia*. The plot of the *Tragicomedia* is closer to the spirit of Seneca's tragedies and alive with reminiscences of particular motifs developed in the

Hercules he calls out to God saying: "Oh Thou, tamer of the wild beasts and peacemaker of the world, observe us down here and if any beast—tyrant—troubles the peoples, shoot it down with your arrows."

Senecan *Tragoediae*.⁴⁰ Thus the invocation to Plato by Celestina, the final speech by Melibea to her father, and Elicia's curses when seeking vengeance, all seem to be based on Seneca's *Medea*. *Hercules furens* arguably provides the paradigm for the dramatization of uncontrolled fury. At other times, structural parallels connect scenes from *La Celestina* with their Senecan models. This is the case, for instance, when Tristán collects Calisto's dead body: an episode which has clear similarities with Theseus's recovery of Hippolytus's limbs in *Phaedra*. As we have already seen in the case of Corella's work, *Troades* was a model for the lamentations, and those pronounced by Pleberio in the Spanish *Tragicomedia* likewise draw on this same Senecan play. What is most interesting is not so much the abundance of Senecan references, but the substantial shift that takes place from the *Comedia* to the *Tragicomedia*. The *Comedia* calls upon the moral Seneca, very often through apocryphal texts. The *Tragicomedia* incorporates and adapts new material—which include the tragic Seneca, although now seen from an altered vantage—to refashion the genre of the work. The fact that Fernando de Rojas made sporadic, but not systematic, use of the odd “tragic” element places Seneca's influence in perspective, but at the same time provides a witness to a first step towards the “dramatic” interpretation of the *Tragoediae*, which was to become effective in the sixteenth century.⁴¹ Up until that moment, Seneca's tragedies were read, in the Crown of Aragon and in that of Castile, in different ways and with different interests, sometimes in a moral sense, at other times as a pool of rhetorical, thematic, or mythological resources worthy of being copied and used directly in similar or distinct contexts. Yet, when all is said and done, it nevertheless remains a reception that is largely indebted to the medieval tradition of Seneca.

40 These motifs have been painstakingly catalogued by Río (1995, 288–301), on the basis of the previous bibliography and by gathering the contributions made by Fothergill-Payne (1988). Here I integrate all these data.

41 Nevertheless, the anonymous author of the *Celestina comentada*—a manuscript from the second half of the sixteenth century that glosses the more sententious fragments of *La Celestina*—dispenses with the dramatic nature of Seneca's tragedies when he draws on them as authorities. In fact, although few in number, there are references to practically all the tragedies (except for *Agamemnon* and *Hercules Oetaeus*). Cf. Fothergill-Payne *et al.* 2002.

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The Reception of the Tragedies of Seneca in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries in France

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The presence of Seneca's tragedies in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in France is remarkable, given its pivotal role in the history of French tragedy. At the birth of the genre in the 1550s and its renovation in 1634, playwrights draw abundantly from the Senecan *corpus* in composing their own works. The Senecan presence is remarkable, yet paradoxical, in truth, insofar as critics gradually emerge against the works of Seneca and become increasingly acerbic with time. The answer to this enigma lies in the contrast between the theoretical relationships, as opposed to the practical relationships, that authors establish with Seneca, who becomes a founding father of French tragedy.¹

1 Seneca and the Birth of French Tragedy (1550–1610)

Interest in the ancient theater, noticeable since the Middle Ages, takes on a new dimension during the Renaissance of the sixteenth century. In addition

¹ A number of general studies on the history of tragedy in the Renaissance address the Senecan legacy: Émile Faguet (1883); Raymond Lebègue (1977; 1954; 1929); Henry Buckley Charlton (1946). A collection of articles compiled by Jean Jacquot (1964) offers a more precise approach, albeit a partial one, and in a comparative perspective between French, Spanish, Italian, and English tragedy. Finally, the study of Elliot Forsyth (1993) offers a more comprehensive timeline while excluding the pieces not relevant to revenge. Much information on the influence of Seneca in the seventeenth century is available in contemporary editions of the plays marked with the seal of the Latin playwright, but also in the works of Ronald Tobin (1971; 1999) or the important article by John Lapp (1964). Several studies treat the relationship between the model translation and imitation: e.g., Karl Böhm (1902); Otto Klucke (1884); Marie Delcourt-Curvers (1925). None of these analyses, however, offers a global view of Seneca's influence, or the reasons behind it, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. My recent work (2011), *Sénèque le Tragique en France (xvi^e-xvii^e siècle)*, presents such a study, which this chapter condenses. The book's bibliography contains a more complete picture of sources and studies (1071–1105).

to the rediscovery of the architecture of the ancient theater through architectural treatises, there is a proliferation of reprints and translations of classical texts: theoretical tracts,² Greek and Latin works, several Latin translations of Greek tragedies, and no less than five editions of Seneca between 1512 and 1548. If these developments provide a better understanding of the ancient theater, and of tragedy in particular, the definition of the latter remains unclear. Theoretical reflections, often post-practice, partake of the Horatian tradition of the mid-century, but also reveal continuities with genres in vogue at the time, especially the morality play. While tragedy and the morality converge in the moralizing purpose both serve at the time, the nature of the characters and the misfortunes suffered in each genre differ. These differences may be due to the facts that the debate focuses on the French language, and that theoreticians and playwrights do not truly question tragedy as a genre until Jean de La Taille's *Art de la tragédie* (1572). It is essential, then, to place the influence of Senecan drama in the context of the debate about the enrichment of the French language that haunts the period.

1.1 *Imitating or Translating Seneca?*

No less than thirteen of the tragedies composed in the second half of the sixteenth century take the works of Seneca as a model: Jean de La Péruse's *Médée* (1556); the *Agamemnon* of Charles Toustain (1556) and that of François Duchat (1561); Robert Garnier's *Hippolyte* (1573), *Troade* (1579), and *Antigone* (1580); Pierre Matthieu's *Clytemnestre* (1589); Roland Brisset's *Hercule furieux*, *Thyeste*, *Agamemnon*, and *Octavie* (1589); the *Octavie* of Guillaume Regnault (1599); and the *Hippolyte* of Jean Yeuwain (1591). The playwright therefore leaves his mark at the very birth of French tragedy. The rediscovery of ancient theater offers only a partial explanation to this fact, and there is nothing obvious in the choice of Seneca as a dramaturgical model. Scholars such as Justus Lipsius and Daniel Heinsius, who distinguish up to four authors, challenge the attribution of the plays to Seneca, and the theorists have little to say: Joachim Du Bellay, in his *Défense et illustration de la langue française* (1547), is allusive in the models he prescribes; Jacques Peletier du Mans in his *Art poétique* (1555) finds him "weighty" and "obscure," yet "nonetheless sententious and, with judgment, worthy of imitation" (quoted in Le Blanc 1972, 67). Jacques Grévin, lingering on the merits of the Greek dramatists in his *Brief discours pour l'intelligence du théâtre* (1561), does not mention Seneca's name; Jean de La Taille puts him on the same level as "moules des anciens" (models of antiquity); Jean Vauquelin

2 Especially Horace's *Ars Poetica*, Diomedes's *De grammatica*, and the *De tragoedia et comoedia* of Donatus.

de la Fresnaye in his *Art poétique* (1605)³ and Pierre de Laudun d'Aigaliers in *Art poétique français* (1597) do not explicitly designate him as a model to be followed.

The explanation lies in the cultural and philosophical context of the time. The revival of Stoicism, the locations of the educational and intellectual centers in which the first French tragic authors evolve, and the attraction of the themes staged exert important influences. Colleges, including those of Guyenne in Bordeaux, Coqueret and Boncourt in Paris, and their regents (Georges Buchanan, Marc Antoine Muret, and Jean Dorat, to name three) play a key role in the dissemination of Seneca's tragedies. They welcome the poets of the Pleiade and the authors of the first French tragedies during the years 1540 to 1550.⁴ Playwrights who take Seneca as a model after 1570, though, (Garnier, Matthieu, Brisset) are no longer among the circles of scholars. They turn to the Latin playwright mainly because of the appeal of the themes of his works, which echo political and religious events at end of the sixteenth century. The myth of Atreus, that of the Labdacids, and the fate of the Trojans feature scenes of tyrants and fratricidal conflicts; Phaedra's ruin highlights erotic passion devouring all; finally, predestination to suffering and divine punishment mark the Senecan plays. In the time of religious wars, such subjects offer an illustration of the contemporary horrors and ideological turmoil of the period. Playwrights accordingly find a style, a philosophy, a representation of human weaknesses, and a moral and theatrical model for deploying pathos and lyricism.

The choice of Senecan tragedy as a dramaturgical model results both from competition between French authors within the poetic circles and from the appropriation of timely themes echoing events of the late sixteenth century. The reception of Seneca's tragic works is part of the vast movement of enriching the French language that concerns authors of the period, and, in this perspective, the relationships they establish with their model elucidate the spectrum of forms between close imitation and free imitation.

On the theoretical side, the debates concerning translation and imitation are lively at a time when it comes to asserting the French language and conferring a pedigree to its national literature. Translation, placed in the domain of critical discourse by Etienne Dolet in his *Manière de bien traduire d'une langue en autre* (*Way to Translate Well from One Language to Another*, 1540),

3 Vauquelin began his *Art poétique* in 1574, but it was not published until 1605.

4 Jodelle authored the *Cléopâtre captive*, the first true French tragedy in 1553; La Péruse, author of the *Médée* composed in 1553, left the work unfinished. Scévole de Sainte Marthe, who was also a student of the college of Boncourt, completed the work.

and considered as a means to enrich the French language, gradually fades into the background over the course of the sixteenth century. In the wake of *La Défense et illustration de la langue française* (The Defense and Enrichment of the French Language, 1549), theorists advocate not merely imitation, but the transcendence of imitation through a creative authorial intervention that must “adjouster quelque chose de son esprit au surplus” (“contribute something additional of its own spirit”), as Laudun d’Aigaliers puts it at the end of the century. While refusing slavish imitation and rejecting translation, theorists urge a greater detachment vis-à-vis the models. There is little discussion of tragedy in these debates, which is, at that time, more an experimental laboratory of the French language to young writers making their start before tackling the supreme genre: poetry.

Playwrights who turn to Seneca adopt two forms of relation to their model: close imitation and free imitation. The first is characterized by a close relationship with the Latin text, but does not rule out additions, amplifications, or minor changes that reflect a practice situating creativity in terms of *elocutio* (style). Such is the case of Toustain and Duchat in their versions of *Agamemnon*, which are often described by later critics—although never by the authors themselves—as translations. Their practice, as much virtuosic demonstration as work of youth, or even exercise of scholarly style, contributes both to the introduction of Senecan tragedy as a genre and a model, and, indirectly, to the dissemination of the general structure of Latin drama. Later in the century, Brisset (1589), Regnault (1599), and to a lesser extent Yeuwain (1591), exemplify such practice. In the first two, however, the didactic effect outweighs the linguistic aspect that was primary in Toustain and Duchat. The changes Brisset and Regnault introduce accentuate specific character traits, particularly cruelty, tyranny, and the nobility of soul. These emphases relate to the politico-religious situation of the time, which directs scholars to a commitment in their writing, and also evidence the fact that the French language is no longer considered impoverished and neglected, as it was in 1550.

La Péruse initiates the second form, free imitation, with his *Médée* in 1556, and Garnier and Matthew later develop it. Free imitation is characterized by a more or less general, rather than merely stylistic, detachment from the source. Free imitation does not exclude close imitation, which is still present in many passages. Moving and intermingling passages from a combination of sources, free imitation does not exclude close imitation, which is still present in many instances. La Péruse, for example, combines Euripides and Seneca, occasionally borrows from Ovid, Virgil, and Rosnard (evident in the form of flashbacks), and adds elements of his own. In Garnier’s works, the play offering the most numerous combinations of sources is *Hippolyte*: the *Hippolytus* of Euripides

and Seneca's *Phaedra* are predominant, but *Hercules furens*, *Hercules Oetaeus*, *Octavia*, *Medea*, and *Agamemnon* also provide one-time loans. The contamination is even more complex in *La Troade* and *Antigone*: the reprises of Seneca are less important, and the major sources are more diverse. Seneca is not the only source used as model, and Garnier does not hesitate to add personal elements. It is through this work that Garnier establishes his authorial status. With the success of his plays, in turn, Seneca passes into the background, and Garnier himself becomes a point of reference for French tragedy which thus begins to assert its own models. Matthieu follows in the same line by observing an even greater detachment from the Latin playwright, close to Garnier's treatment of sources in *Hippolyte*, which testifies to the accession of the latter as the new canon.

1.2 *A Tension between Action and Poetry*

While the type of Senecan imitation evolves, the imprint of Seneca remains very strong in terms of the organization of the plays. At the rebirth of tragedy in France, close imitation contributes to the recovery of the structure of the Latin drama which is marked by heavy static action energized by the poetic word. Even if his combination of sources leads La Péruse to arrange material differently, the overall construction of his *Médée* follows the principle of the announcement of the outcome from the start, as does the Senecan prototype. Like the latter, La Péruse, Toustain, and Duchat balance dramatic stasis with powerful verbal dynamism, which is especially at work in the chorus. Excellent examples of verbal creation through prosodic and stylistic research and influenced by the kind of ode flourishing at the time, the choruses are not involved in the action as characters, but drive dramatic tension while analyzing the behavior of the characters. Such verbal vitality extends to the rest of the play, but to a slightly different purpose: to voice the characters' feelings, to see their behavior, to articulate horror and the invisible. From the Latin matrix, they exploit the potential of the French language and give birth to true dramatic poems, where tragic action lies within the contemplation of the sufferers.

The emergence of a theoretical reflection on the tragic genre (notably in La Taille's *Art poétique* in 1572), the introduction of Aristotle's *La Poétique* by Julius Caesar Scaliger (1561), and the religious and political context influenced playwrights in the last quarter of the sixteenth century. Brisset and Regnault, "close imitators" whose changes give their plays a historically engaged dimension, still preserve the Senecan dramatic structure. While inscribing a personal and passionate drama within a framework of divine vengeance, Garnier and Matthieu craft, *in fine*, Senecan stasis in the construction of sources of *Hippolytus* and *Clytemnestra*: the shade of Aegeus and that of Thyestes announce the outcome

at the outset. In contrast to *Hippolyte*, Garnier's *La Troade* and *Antigone* lack a model structure, as both issue from a combination of several sources. In his dramatization of the punishment exacted by the victors in *La Troade* (after foreshadowing its horrors), Garnier combines Senecan static lament, which recurs throughout the first four acts, with the dynamism of the punishment itself in the fifth.⁵ In *Antigone*, he abandons the pattern of developing the consequences of a previous act and restores the agency of the individual characters throughout the play, as is the case in the final act of *La Troade*.⁶ Thus, Garnier energizes Senecan *gravitas*. Nevertheless, despite Garnier's dynamic use of language, these works remain pregnant with the Senecan static effect. In this way, free imitation leads to a breach in the initial Senecan balance between action and poetry, which the close imitations had preserved. A certain verbal profusion persists, through the dramatization of speech and one-upmanship in horror, while the lyrical fades, especially in the chorus, because of the preeminence French authors confer upon tragedy's didactic role. These transformations reflect the emergence of reflection on the nature of the tragic genre inherited from the tragedies of Seneca: tragedy becomes distinct from lyrical and poetic literature.

1.3 *Senecan Excess and Humanizing Characters*

Imitations and adaptations, whether close or free, follow Senecan models of characterization. Characters are marked by a cursed heritage that looms over their actions. If the first generation of French tragedians, comprising La Péruse, Toustain, and Duchat, innovated little, in the absence of true dramaturgic thinking and due to the primacy accorded to the enrichment of the French language, there is a noticeable evolution in the last quarter of the sixteenth century. Characters assume more control of their destiny which they are unwilling to predict, and we see an expansion of debates regarding their guilt. Brisset, for instance, attempts to blur the inherently evil nature of the hero from birth, and remains ambiguous on the omnipotence of fate. Conversely, Garnier, Matthieu, and Regnault retain the motif of cursed ancestry, but the immanent forces that govern their characters—whether gods, Fortune, fate, God, or heaven—become embodiments of misfortune or a pretext used by the criminals. In these inflections, it is actually the roles of the gods or the guilt of

5 After the succession of sacrifices of these Children (Polyxène et Polydore) and of her grandson (Astyanax), Hecuba is the avenging arm of divinity in blinding Polymestor and killing his children.

6 Antigone, through her voluntary sacrifice, redeems (and this is what distinguishes *Antigone* from *La Troade*) the crimes of the Labdacids through her filial devotion.

the heroes that is questioned. Garnier and Matthieu highlight the goodness of the gods and impart Christian accents to divine justice which they portray as implacable. They emphasize rewards for virtuous characters,⁷ and introduce the Christian idea of forgiveness which some of their tragic criminals request.⁸ Such forgiveness, though, does not prevent the execution of justice. The introduction of the debate on guilt, often linked to a reflection on political power and the nature of laws (divine, natural, human), highlights mitigating circumstances and gives characters greater human depth.

This humanization, also evident in the individualization of secondary characters, takes place alongside the emphasis on fury inherited from Seneca undiluted: the *dolor* and *furor* that animate Seneca's characters⁹ leave their mark on the works of his French imitators and adaptors, whose writing highlights and enhances animal monstrosity and physical symptoms of the passions by combining visual, musical, and bodily elements. Paradoxically, this exacerbated fury furthers the humanization of the characters. It reveals the extent of human weakness rather than monstrosity in response to external stress (love, power, and so on). The words 'honor' and 'reason,' inherited from the sixteenth century, do not mask the passivity of the characters who suffer events, with the notable exception of Antigone in her willful opposition to tyranny. These nuances that give a psychological depth to characters without transforming their fundamental nature take place in a partially renewed structure. Faced with lengthy soliloquies and tirades that reveal a major trait, processes inherited from Seneca, the French imitators introduce a complexity that values the external discourse of messengers' speeches or explanations supplied by the chorus. Spectators or readers are challenged to contemplate the characters' lost reason and reconstruct its course using 'exterior' keys.

By endeavoring less to restore the tragic genre than to exploit the potential of the French language, the first imitators contribute to the transmission of the Senecan model without significant alteration, which partly explains its lasting presence throughout the sixteenth century. The French tragedians who follow the first imitators rework and transform the Senecan model, without, however, eliminating its presence which persists as much in the structural layout as in the style. The evolution in imitative practice—with the appearance of new tragic exemplars written in French, and hence national literary models—indicates the growing complexity of the Senecan presence in humanist tragedy. If the beginnings of a reflection on the tragic genre have resulted in some

7 Consider, for example, Antigone in the eponymous play by Garnier.

8 Phaedra in Garnier's *Hippolyte*, and the shade of Agrippe that begs forgiveness from Octavie in Regnault's piece.

9 For a detailed study of this aspect, see Florence Dupont 1995.

changes, the emergence in the following century of lively theoretical debates brings a real challenge to the Senecan model which nevertheless continues to exert influence.

2 A Model in Turmoil? (1610–1645)

2.1 *Humanist Heritage and Transformation in the First Third of the Seventeenth Century*

In the first third of the seventeenth century, the fame of Seneca is undeniable, whether as a philosopher, acerbic writer, or playwright. Although the massacres of the religious wars are past, this period is not free of tremors that evoke fears of a return to the darkest times. The literary production of the early seventeenth century retains the imprint of violence and anxiety related to political and religious unrest: a dark and haunted Senecanism thus manifests in the most diverse writings—which we consider to be in the fashion of tragic histories. Knowledge of Seneca's drama also feeds on the dissemination of commentaries to his tragedies, such as those of the Jesuit Martin Del Rio (*Syntagma Tragoediae Latinae*, 1593), Justus Lipsius (*Animadversiones*, 1589 and 1601), and Daniel Heinsius (published in the Leiden edition of the Latin tragedies of Seneca in 1611).

Despite this presence, few authors take over, in the strict sense, the same subjects as Seneca's tragedies. One notes the *Hercule* (1613) and the *Œdipe* (1614) by Jean Prévost, as well as Pierre Mainfray's *Hercule* (1616), while in 1629 the first verse translation of all Latin tragedies attributed to one or more 'Seneca' appears. Hercules and Oedipus sufficed to seduce the minds of that time: the infernal or horrible visions, the presence of the marvelous and the supernatural, heroes confronting trials leading either to redemption or to endless purgatory. Many different elements reveal these two characters as emblematic figures of the polymorphism that characterizes the literature under Henry IV and the Regency and explain their appeal.

Heirs of close imitation, the *Hercule* and the *Œdipe* of Prévost demonstrate, by their transformations, the tentative steps of the author to distance himself from his models without losing the spirit of ancient drama. Prévost's works simplify and amplify (notably descriptions, comparisons, and passages that focus on violence) in ways similar to the close imitations of the sixteenth century. However, in removing certain passages and redistributing material, he turns more openly toward free imitation. In contrast, Mainfray's piece is more of an adaptation, in that its structure (a tragedy in four acts) deviates from the classical model. It retains some elements of the Latin *Hercules Oetaeus*, and is equally inspired by Seneca's *Hercules furens* and Garnier's *Hippolyte*. Above all,

Mainfray inserts themes from the pastoral and tragicomic genres: a romantic sub-plot and magic.¹⁰ Finally, the example of Benoit Bauduyn, who proposes the first French verse translation of Seneca's tragedies (and presents his work as such) completes the spectrum of the diverse relations French authors establish with the Senecan model. Intending a simple, rather than a poetic, version of Seneca, he rejects the servitude of word-for-word translation and the practice of 'paraphrase,' the theoretical positions that mark the close imitations focused on developing the French language.

This posture, between continuity and rupture with the humanist inheritance, also marks the topics, the composition, and the writing of the works. If, like Garnier, Prévost inscribes his plays within the general scheme of divine vengeance,¹¹ Mainfray, more audacious, transforms the initial subject. The combination of sources, reminiscences and inventions leads to a tragedy dramatizing revenge of the gods. The immortality Hercules acquires at the end of the piece sanctions the failure of Juno's vengeance vis-à-vis Jupiter, and any legal or religious dimension is erased. If subjects are inflected in the wake of the experiences of the past century or processed in a more innovative way, the arrangement of parts develops the previous efforts at dramatic dynamism, not without contrast to the earlier works. There is greater liveliness in Prévost than in his predecessors, which results from inserting dialogues, as Garnier had done: confessions and stories are thereby delayed and new themes appear. Mainfray achieves similar liveliness by staging elements that were initially contained within narrative, diminishing, in this way, the role of epic. But if Prévost dramatizes epic moments, the amplifications with which such moments engage eventually slow down the action with ornamental rhetoric. Similarly, the presence of long tirades in Mainfray vitiates the dynamics of his enactments. The resulting contrast finds explanation in the oscillation between the chief goals assigned to tragedy: to please or to instruct. If the didactic dimension is perceptible in Prévost, the more nuanced lyricism that affects his writing reveals a pleasure in beautiful description (especially when revealing horror) that is the author's hallmark. Similarly, Mainfray, by multiplying mythological examples repeatedly, glides from instruction to pleasure. In sum, the variety of

10 Deianeira and Iole are both in love with Hercules, who has feelings for both. The poisoned cloak of Nessus tints the play with magic.

11 Oedipus does not conduct a simple search for the truth, but seems punished at the end of the play for his crimes, while *Hercule* presents a check on Juno's divine vengeance, and is to be interpreted as an apotheosis rendered possible by a return to humanity through his forgiveness of Deianeira (a contemporary inflexion).

tones—the most touching lyricism in Prévost to the elements recalling pastoral or tragicomedy in Mainfray, when it does not tilt toward some triviality—underlines the desire to please that counterbalances instruction.

Ultimately, the contrast resulting in the break between action and poetry has its roots in the evolution of conceptions of character. We find the vehemence of Seneca's own characters sometimes transferred to other characters in Mainfray. However, the variety of tones and shades of lyricism result from the greater complexity of heroes: fear of the married woman, characters conquered by love, etc. All are additions aimed at arousing the pleasure of the reader/spectator. Yet, this renewal of the typology is marked by a strong monolithic quality linked to the omnipotence of fate with which the playwrights stamp their plays. This stamps out a real psychological evolution in Prévost and allows Mainfray to artificially ensure consistency between nuances of character. The *magnanimitas* of a Christianized Hercules in Prévost, the humility of his Oedipus, and the grandeur of soul colored with social propriety of Mainfray's Hercules—though these characters are certainly marked with the Senecan seal—reflect the playwrights' attempts to free themselves from ancient models according to the tastes of the early seventeenth century.

2.2 *The Turn of 1634–1635*

After six years of intense theoretical debate between 1628 and 1634, centered on rules and dramatic probability, tragedy, which had ceased to exist on the French stage, again sees the light of day. In the space of a year, no fewer than five tragedies are performed, three of which are Senecan borrowings: Jean Rotrou's *Hercule mourant* (1634), the *Hippolyte* of Guérin de La Pinelière (1634), and Pierre Corneille's *Médée* (1634–1635). It is tempting to draw a parallel between this renovation and the birth of French tragedy eighty years earlier. Yet, the six years of debate have resulted in a dramatic critique of Seneca's works. Facing the old guard represented by Alexandre Hardy, the young authors, from the school of François de Malherbe, question Senecan style. The abundance of *sententiae*, according to Honoré d'Urfé in *Au Lecteur of La Sylvanire ou la morte vive* (1625), is opposed to the pleasure advocated by the *irréguliers*, or proponents of *vers irréguliers* (irregular unrhymed verse). The debates turn slowly to the question of dramatic structure. Theorists and playwrights between 1628 and 1634, whether radical or nuanced in their criticism, are concerned not with the Senecan mode of writing, but with questioning what defines a theatrical text. By focusing, in the name of the pleasure of the spectator, on dramatic enactment rather than narrative, the *irréguliers*, such as François Ogier, Antoine-André Mareschal, and Jean-Gilbert Durval, reject the Senecan

model (and especially the long messenger speeches and prolix descriptions). The *réguliers*, such as Antoine Gombault and Jean Chapelain, do not condone what they consider to be excessive in several previous French imitations. This attitude may seem totally new vis-à-vis an author such as Seneca who had previously been an undisputed model for tragedy. Actually, though, it continues the previous experiments of certain imitators with an awareness of the period and the tastes of the French public, which was fond of spectacle. The move from questions of style to those of structure results in a true analytical critique of the operating principle of Senecan tragedy. In addition, the common rejection of slavish imitation of the classics by both *réguliers* and *irréguliers* could only support such a move. Seneca's tragedies, rejected by the *irréguliers*, become a model to be adapted, according to the criteria of reason and dramatic probability.

The authors who, for the sake of defiance, challenge, or emulation, as much as the attraction of his didactic potential, take Seneca as model engage in a complex work with the sources. The choruses are removed, amplification is diminished (style no longer being the primary concern), and the mythological erudition fades. Playwrights practice contamination of ancient and contemporary sources. Rotrou borrows from Seneca's *Hercules furens*, Guérin de La Pinelière turns to Euripides for his Venus prologue, and Corneille reinserts the character of Aegeus, who is present in Euripides's *Medea*, but not in Seneca's. The addition of a romantic sub-plot by Corneille and Rotrou helps link these different elements. Their adaptations of Seneca thus tend to change the nature of the exemplar's subject. Highlighting the lovers Iole and Arcas suffering the tyranny of Hercules transforms Rotrou's tragedy, which ends in pastoral after the accession of the hero to immortality. By inserting criticism of the court entourage, Guérin de La Pinelière treats the theme of the prince (Theseus) abused by his inner circle (wife and courtier). Finally, Corneille adds a private drama, the revenge of Medea, to a political drama, in that the eponymous protagonist has become, through the treatment of sources, an agent in a political episode.

Since style no longer claims priority, the playwrights focus on dramaturgy, reflecting the theoretical emphases of the time (rules and dramatic probability) and their willingness to adapt the genre to their contemporary period. The unities of time and place are generally maintained, but respect for unity of action is more delicate, especially in Rotrou, where the emotions of Arcas, the love rival to Hercules, play no role in accomplishing the death of Hercules. However, their construction renews, roughly, the static Senecan form. If Guérin de La Pinelière's works seem closest to Senecan dispositions, his reorganization of elements and additions introduce delay effects that maintain dramatic

tension. Rotrou and Corneille transform dramatic progression through twists and turns and surprise effects, created by the insertion of the romantic sub-plot and the staging of more-or-less happy episodes.¹² Such effects are inseparable from the transformations the French playwrights make to their characters.

The precepts of Aristotle, widely available since the end of the sixteenth century, tend to alter nature, offering paradigmatic characters. The three authors strengthen certain traits, and therefore the typology of characters stemming from their model. The jealousy of the abandoned wife and the pathos of unrequited love receive accentuation in Deianeira, Phaedra, and Medea, who, in other places, takes the role of victim through the depredations of Jason and Creon. Playwrights qualify the initial typology through the insertion of new elements from other tragedies or other genres. Characters come to be more difficult to classify in a particular type. In introducing or individuating secondary characters in particular, the playwrights draw from other genres. Aegeus in *Médée* represents the type of the amorous old man, a stranger to the world of tragedy. The gallant accents of Arcas, the innocent victim of Hercules's tyranny, recalls the pastoral. Similar inflections mark the Senecan characters themselves. Hercules is amorous, and Jason, in love with Creusa, displays a varied palette of gallantry. Finally, Guérin de la Pinelière's Phaedra is a woman fully aware of her crime, and thus pity falls upon Hippolytus and the duped Theseus. Deianeira accuses herself in Rotrou, Hercules has a part in his responsibility for the tyranny he exercises over Iole and Arcas, while Medea, although guilty in the past, is presented as a victim of Creon and Creusa. Finally, they no longer appear crushed by a transcendent force, and the opposition that borders on self-transcendence sometimes combines with sublime rage according to various processes: Rotrou reveals nuances of character in upsets and confrontations, while Corneille uses sincerity or hypocrisy of speech, and La Pinelière proves less audacious in this respect. These changes lead to a renewal of the place and function of language.

The critiques of Senecan style and the reflections concerning the goal of tragedy (to please or to instruct) lead to a reduction of *sententiae*. La Pinelière's characters still utter them in place of the Senecan tragic chorus, but they disappear from Rotrou's and Corneille's texts. Instruction takes first place for the structure and final issue of the piece, whereas the second, subordinating the useful to pleasure, offers the portrait of "crime in her triumphal chariot," sufficiently eloquent in itself. The diminution of sententious language corresponds with that of the epic dimension, resulting from speech which is always

12 Corneille denounces in his *Examen* of 1660 the spectacle of the deaths of Creon and Creusa that he offers in the fifth act of his play.

revealing the monstrous, although it aspires to be more than merely ornamental. When the playwrights bring their works to the stage, the language often doubles the impact of the action, underlining once again the interest taken in dramatic structure. The lyricism that marks the Senecan model and the earlier imitators becomes nuanced: the expression of feelings becomes more stereotypical, welcoming romantic inflections (as in the bucolic of *La Pinelière*), and musicality finds a privileged (although smaller) place in the stanzas these works include.

The years 1634–1635 mark a turning point in the reception of Seneca's tragedies: a revered yet contested model, the Latin playwright cannot be imitated without transformation. Free imitation bends toward the imitation of Rotrou, *La Pinelière*, and Corneille, whose experiments manage to draw from their source to fashion a French tragedy suited to the theoretical and scenic expectations of the time.

2.3 *To Imitate Seneca or to Rewrite Imitations? (1635–1645)*

Although tragedy finds an unprecedented place in the years following this renovation, the works borrowing from Seneca are few: there is the *Hercule Furieux* by Hérítier de Nouvelon (1638), the *Antigone* of Rotrou (drawn partly from *Phoenissae*), Sallebray's *La Troade* (1639), the *Thyeste* by Monléon (1640), and the *Agamemnon* of Arnaud (1642). The reduced stage presence is due to the changing tastes of the public and new theoretical principles touted as essential. Senecan subjects become problematic because of their violence, inspiring horror more than terror, and contrary to the achievement of catharsis, as argued by Hippolyte-Jules Pilet de La Mesnardière in his *Poétique* (1639), where he criticizes almost everything about the plays: blood on stage, unpunished criminals, uncivil characters, and so on. The advent of a new relationship between ethos and pathos in the design of characters, resulting from the *Querelle du Cid*,¹³ imposes an additional codification that argues against Senecan forms: ethos enters into conflict with pathos, whereas the first had formerly been contained completely within the latter (as in the Senecan plays) and emerged victorious at the conclusion. Moreover, criticism of Senecan speech, especially the expression of feelings, argues against using him as a model. Rigor and purification of language gradually assert themselves through a concern with verisimilitude applied to style. Finally, theoretical developments concerning the relation between a dramatic work and its model make it increasingly difficult to choose Seneca. Theorists reject the slavish imitation

13 Corneille's play *Le Cid*, which violated classical unities, provoked this major controversy about dramatic forms.

of the ancients and subordinate invention to structure. Subjects and the treatment of borrowed passages become the prime concerns, and the room for maneuver left to authors is limited.

In practice, the explicit reference to antiquity virtually disappears among the five authors named above. With the exception of Monléon, who signals a distancing from Seneca, playwrights grow silent about their sources. It is for them to write, from a known substrate, a work that vies not with the Senecan model, but with previous French imitations. Eventually they only retain the key Senecan subjects: the murder of Megara and her children by Hercules, Thyestes's children served to their father by Atreus, the death of Agamemnon, the sacrifice of Polyxena and Astyanax and the despair of their mother, the fratricidal struggle between Eteocles and Polynices. The weak Senecan presence is further undermined considering that Arnaud removes the character of Cassandra and that the choruses all disappear. Playwrights resort to a complex contamination, a "mosaic"¹⁴ of ancient sources filtered through their imitators. In addition, they add new elements and transform the original myths beyond recognition, contrary to the recommendations of La Mesnardière in his *Poétique*. Thus Rotrou develops the loving bond between Antigone and Haemon, while Sallebray in *La Troade* presents an Agamemnon made aware of his wife's infidelity with Aegisthus by a letter from his son. Aegisthus becomes a king in love with Cassandra and bent on avenging his murdered children, and thus Sallebray transforms the myth and shifts the subject of the play from the misfortunes endured by the female Trojan captives to the Greeks' problematic departure from Troy. The numerous secondary characters play important roles in the outcomes of the plays, while their antics push the limits of verisimilitude, especially in Arnaud's *Agamemnon*. The eponymous hero is no more than a blind man to a wife left 'widow' for ten years, now in love with Aegisthus and wanting to kill her husband for his past infidelities.

The multiple inputs give birth to pieces charged with events and strongly distanced from their sources. Yet, the Latin structure is still present, the alterations contributing to create an illusion of reversibility (not a true reversibility) that masks the ineluctability of the outcome announced at the opening of the play. Rotrou, Monléon, Sallebray, and Arnaud try to renew the Latin structure, without success. If Monléon introduces the revenge more gradually, he remains close to the Senecan model: although he removes the protactic shade of Tantalus, he puts the proleptic announcement of vengeance in Atreus's mouth. Rotrou, Sallebray, and Arnaud introduce an opposition that seems

14 I borrow the expression "*mosaïque des sources*" from Bénédicte Louvat, who uses it in reference to the *Antigone* of Rotrou.

to make the outcome of the play more uncertain. However, their attempt is not completely outside the Senecan pattern. In *Antigone*, Rotrou plays with attempts to interfere in the interpretation of the divine oracle. It is only an illusory reversibility, though, since it is difficult to oppose a divine oracle, and since a number of effects vitiate the ineffectual interference. Sallebray offers a sterile opposition in the character of Agamemnon: in love with Cassandra, he seeks to thwart the sacrifices of Polyxena and Astyanax, but the fate of the Trojans does not depend on the sheer will of the king, since Calchas and the shade of Achilles subject them to divine will. Finally, in his *Agamemnon*, Arnaud uses the characters of Electra and Eurybates to oppose the blindness of Agamemnon in the face of Clytemnestra's and Aegisthus's intrigues. But the appearance of Thyestes to his son in a dream during the first act diminishes the attempted revitalization of the action. Finally, the *Hercule furieux* of L'Héritier de Nouvelon seems somewhat distinct because of its duplicity of action, and it is difficult to find a unifying pattern.¹⁵ Although lacking unity and still marked with the Senecan seal in terms of the *dispositio*, these works offer spectators heightened suspense and dramatic tension.

This consideration of the spectator leads to a change in the importance accorded to language. The French authors emphasize spectacle and action where Seneca would use hypotyposis. Is this to say that the epic dimension is diminishing? In Monléon and Arnaud, and to a lesser extent in L'Héritier de Nouvelon, it is, but nothing of the sort occurs in Rotrou or Sallebray. Rotrou is more sober than Garnier, but he introduces two new stories drawn from Statius: the suicide of Menoeceus and the divination of Tiresias. He reaches a new balance of renewed progress, maintaining a sober epic dimension put into action. On this last point, Sallebray does not replace the Senecan stories by representation, and sometimes engages in the same kind of amplification. If the epic no longer holds the place it did in Seneca, the moral and lyrical dimensions take on new aspects. Although Senecan *sententiae* receive no direct acknowledgment, they leave their mark in the works of these playwrights, even without amplification and without the chorus that originally uttered them. The construction and enhancement of characters particularly enrich the didactic dimension. Lyricism shifts to new forms, including those stanzas that fill the function of the ancient chorus.

15 The duplicity of action is related to the eviction of the religious dimension of the Latin piece: the French piece, in the beginning, presents the struggle against the tyrant Lycus, then inclines to divine vengeance without connection to the previous episode. Further, the return of Alcestis, introduced by the author, does not interfere with the Lycus punishment or even the vengeance of Juno.

In the structuring of their plays and the renewal that they propose in the progress of the action, playwrights do not divest the influence of Seneca which is also evident in the design of characters. Their multiplication, which results in more encounters, leads to a reinforcement of character types rather than to more complex characters. Few borrowings derive from other genres, and, in order to streamline the roles of type-characters, playwrights codify their actions, which helps to explain their calcification. The authors accentuate the features of the tyrant, criminal, or victim, who become emblematic of vice or virtue. If previous writers introduced magic and romance, those between 1637 and 1645 remember only the romantic dimension resulting from the pastoral, especially in Arnaud's focus on Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, or in Monléon's portrayal of the affair between Thyestes and Atreus's wife, Merope. The only notable exception is the Agamemnon of Sallebray, who repudiates his wife, and cannot be accused of infidelity without tampering with the mythological credibility of the character. Finally, there are some shifts in relation to the values of the period: Arnaud's Agamemnon approaches the figure of the ideal monarch, and the Hercules of L'Héritier de Nouvelon, in the mercy he shows to his wife, suggests the reasonable sovereign. Such modern influences also appear in the figures of courtiers and confidants that add to their educational role more varied psychological depth (of the courtier daring the darkest excesses to serve his own interests, for example). The necessary structural adjustments thus paradoxically lead to a more marked influence of Seneca in the typology of the characters, and therefore in their mode of operation. The strengthening of one trait accents their monolithic nature, there is little room for interior dilemma, and the absence of remorse at the end of the tragedy, among some of them, nourishes horror for didactic ends. Heroism is then in the greatness of self-transcendence or opposition, the latter being a new tone linked to the desire to disrupt linear action. However, opposition raises confrontations rather than genuine interiorization, with some exceptions.¹⁶

Despite the emphasis of certain character traits, the expression of feelings is more natural in Rotrou, Arnaud, and, to a lesser extent, Sallebray: passionate love is conveyed through a marked gallantry and worldly uses without preciousness or *recherché* stylistics. Similarly, the expression of fury becomes more sober with a decrease in the physical symptoms such as tears, fainting, and loss of speech. Lyricism manifests in the stanzas, in which the style is more

16 Aegisthus, at the beginning of Arnaud's *Agamemnon*, fights against the crime demanded by his father, Thyestes, who appears in a dream. Agamemnon in Sallebray's *La Troade* embodies the victor conquered by love. In a monologue, he juxtaposes his duty as a king with his love: a futile opposition, since events do not depend upon him.

nuanced, as in the general discourse. It is then the monologues that support characters' hesitations and delays.

Seneca, a recognized model, is being challenged. While French playwrights continue to draw from his works, they must adapt them. The Senecan legacy is contested, and, if it persists, it will be increasingly difficult to assert in the second part of the seventeenth century.

3 Rehabilitation and Disappearance of Seneca in the Second Half of the Seventeenth Century

The second half of the Seventeenth century offers a contrasting landscape of Senecan imitations. Between 1645 and 1665, only three pieces present a Senecan subject: the *Hippolyte* by Gabriel Gilbert (1646), Corneille's *Œdipe* (1659), and Jean Racine's *La Thébaïde* (1664); between 1675 et 1683, no fewer than seven tragedies take the Latin author as their source: Mathieu Bidar's *Hippolyte* (1675), *Hippolyte et Phèdre* (1677) by Jacques ("Nicolas") Pradon, the *Phèdre et Hippolyte* (1677) of Racine, Pradon's *La Troade* (1679), the *Agamemnon* (1680) of Claude Boyer, the *Hercule* (1682) by Jean François Juvenon La Tuillerie, and *La Mort d'Hercule* (1683) by Florent Carton Dancourt; in the last decade, the *Médée* (1694) of Hilaire-Bernard de Longepierre is the only tragedy inspired by Seneca. While Seneca seems almost abandoned from 1645–1665, it is these years that see the publication of two complete translations of his Latin tragedies: that of Pierre Linage de Vauciennes in 1651 and those of Michel de Marolles in 1659.¹⁷ These translations play a significant role in the efflorescence of adaptations of the 1670s which culminates in the aesthetic transformation of tragedy at the end of the century.

3.1 Criticism and Rehabilitation: The Role of Translation

In the second half of the seventeenth century, the climate seems inhospitable to reprising Seneca's plays: the gallant and romantic tragedy that triumphs, especially in the *Timocrate* of Corneille in 1656, overshadows Senecan tragedy, which appears too violent in this period. In addition, new systems of thought challenge the Stoicism that marked the beginning of the century. Finally, criticism is even more severe against the Latin playwright, as evidenced by *La Pratique du théâtre* by the Abbot d'Aubignac (1657). While he proscribes the Senecan dramatic disposition, he holds Senca's style and moral dimension in

17 Not to mention, fifteen years later, the translation of *La Troade* by L.B.

regard. D'Aubignac distances himself from the conclusions of La Mesnardière in several places, and Seneca's image becomes quite mixed. D'Aubignac's attacks are more acerbic than La Mesnardière's. Refusing to systematically accept the seventeenth-century criteria for reading Seneca's drama, d'Aubignac instead tries to place it in the ancient context. Yet, his reading is partisan: he makes comparisons with the Greek tragedies that he judges to be superior, and neglects the dramaturgy proper to Seneca. The attack is even more serious: as La Mesnardière rejects Seneca as impossible to adapt due to contemporary criteria, it is the very worth of the author in his art that is called into question at the outset.

In this unfavorable context, the translation of Senecan plays by Linage, Marolles, and L.B. seems strange. It finds explanation in the nature of their work, reflecting the development of the debates over imitation. They see, in reaction to the practice of the *Belles Infidèles*,¹⁸ the emergence of translation as a genre in itself situated outside the field of literary creation. It is according to this perspective that the three authors locate their work. Survey of the prefaces, introductory texts, and endnotes, and that of the physical presentation of material (Latin with French translation on facing pages), indicate that their task is to place Seneca in his historical and literary context by providing a faithful translation of the original text. This 'objective' vision, which is, in Marolles, a response to the implicit positions of d'Aubignac, shows a real pedagogical concern. However, the will to restore the author's thought takes precedence over the precise transcription of style, despite the theoretical claims touted, and sometimes the theorist or admirer prevails over the humanist concerned with rehabilitating the Latin author. No doubt, however, that these translations aim not only to make a masterpiece of antiquity available to a "non-humanist" public, but also to bring out Seneca's own qualities, independent on the aesthetic criteria of the seventeenth century, by placing his work in historical context: aims that have consequences in the reprise of Senecan subjects in the second half of the century.

3.2 'Moderns' and 'Ancients' in Relation to Seneca (1645–1694)

If the translations rehabilitate Seneca, the criticism brought to bear against the gallant inflection of tragedy helps to explain the renewed interest in Seneca. While Pierre Nicole in his *Traité de la comédie* (1667) condemns all theater, the Prince of Conti is more moderate in distinguishing ancient tragedy from

18 The writers of the *Belles Infidèles* sought to bring ancient authors back to life through translation.

derivatives of contemporary theater that both he and d'Aubignac condemn.¹⁹ The rehabilitation of the old theater is accompanied by a debate about its status as a model during the Quarrel of Ancients and Moderns²⁰ which had become public during the last thirty years. While the Moderns challenge Seneca, the Ancients, advocating the autonomy of the author, assert the modernity of a return to antiquity, synonymous with a refusal to subjugate the tastes of his period and genuine creativity. This return to the fonts of antiquity, however, is qualified, in Seneca's case. René Rapin, in his *Réflexions sur la Poétique d'Aristote* (1674), highlighting the Greeks, denounces Seneca's irregularity, unnatural style, and preference for sublimity over naturalness and simplicity. In his critique of the gallant turn in tragedy, though, he appeals to the "*ministère des fortes passions*" ("ministry of strong passions") to find the true effects of tragedy (fear and pity) and recognizes Seneca's virtues on this point. Taking up the model entails a necessary adaptation, and renders the affirmation of the essential French models, Corneille and Racine, more complex.

Faced with this relation to antiquity, the eleven playwrights who rely on Seneca's works during the second half of the seventeenth century, both Modern and Ancient, reduce the Senecan presence to sporadic borrowings or thoroughgoing rewrites. In the Moderns who choose to adapt the myth of Phaedra (Gilbert, Bidar, Pradon), personal transformations are more important than, and largely supplant, the classical borrowings (from Seneca and Euripides). Corneille in his *Œdipe* and Racine in *Thébaïde* and *Phèdre et Hippolyte*, despite their marked return to the ancient myths, suppress a number of elements and incline their adaptations noticeably toward a romantic emphasis. The decrease in Senecan borrowings finds confirmation during the last quarter of the century in the tragedies of Pradon, Boyer, La Tuillerie, Dancourt and Longepierre (although less pronouncedly due to their bias toward the Ancients). These changes result in a transformation of the construction of the subject.

3.2.1 Construction of Modified Subjects in the 'Moderns'

The partisans of modernity, in their treatment of sources, give primacy to love in their transformed subjects. Thus Bidar and Pradon, in repeating the myth of Phaedra, place their piece under the heading of "amorous conquest," that of

19 D'Aubignac's *Dissertation sur la condamnation des théâtres* (1666) calls for a theater of reasonableness and propriety.

20 The *querelle des Anciens et des Modernes* (quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns) was a famous aesthetic debate in late seventeenth-century France. The Ancients advocated imitation of the famous writers of antiquity, while the Moderns asserted the preeminent knowledge and enlightenment of seventeenth-century authors.

Hippolytus by Phaedra, who is only betrothed to Theseus, not married to him. Bidar, characterizing Phaedra as an inconstant woman no longer attracted to Theseus, and Hippolytus as a youth in love with Cyane, whom he must marry, offers a tragedy of marital failure leading to the death of three of the four betrothed. Pradon, rivaling Racine, portrays the illusory quest of a lover and his tragic death due to the suspicions created involuntarily in his father, Theseus. The transformation of the subject is more radical in Gilbert, who offers a gallant reading of Hippolytus, whose coldness is represented as a virtue. It transfers the incest motif to Theseus, previously married to Ariadne, and thus brother-in-law to Phaedra. Phaedra struggles against the denatured love that Theseus wants to impose on her, while Gilbert makes Hippolytus lust after Phaedra. These three authors, by insertion of elements foreign to tragedy (the pastoral love plot, recourse to methods of counterfeit, and so on), through the removal of all transcendence, anchor their works in a deep humanity. In the last quarter of the century, the subjects chosen all exemplify a furious and criminal love for which they were not always punished, recourse to the amazing (the robes poisoned by Deianeira or Medea), and a predominate transcendence. Through deleting some characters and softening the violence of others, the authors add contemporary elements foreign to the play, or develop the elements present. Their subject, the victor who wants to marry his captive, exemplifies an amorous strategy.²¹ The adaptation points to an actualization according to the tastes of the age through the denaturation of the original myth.

In terms of dramatic structure, authors strive for the Senecan continuous dénouement that results from the predetermined outcome. In their imitations of Phaedra, Gilbert, Bidar, and Pradon construct tragedies of multiple pathos-evoking plot twists. Taking the structure hinged around the return of Theseus in Seneca, Gilbert renews the progression through a subtle language

21 Pradon, in having Ulysses in love with Polyxena and Pyrrhus in love with Andromache in his *Troade*, shows the consequences of the opposition of two warlords to dictates that violate the will of their captives. La Tuillerie and Dancourt, in removing the famous death of Hercules and the characters of Alcmena and her sons, completely suppress the transcendent aspect of their play, yet add Philoctetes as a love rival to Hercules. In La Tuillerie, Philoctetes and Iole are in love with each other, but in Dancourt, Philoctetes's love for Deianeira (who is not married to Hercules in this version) is unrequited. Finally, Boyer, through his borrowings from contemporary tragedy, especially Racine's *Andromaque*, presents a problem of political succession that becomes the tragedy of a victor (Agamemnon) wanting to marry his captive by eliminating all rivals, including his son, Orestes.

game based on the impossible verbal presence of incest.²² This game is at the limit of dramatic credibility and comes at the cost of breaking the unity of action. Bidar retains the focus on Theseus's return, but renews dramatic progression through a series of external obstacles to Phaedra's amorous conquest of Hippolytus. This strategy leads to multiple twists that are based on lies and deliberate interference of language. While an illusion of reversibility arises in the first part, the second part, following the return of the king, follows a thoroughly Senecan progression. Finally, although Pradon's play comprises two parts hinged upon the king's return, Pradon frees himself from the Senecan structure since Theseus acts not to take vengeance on Phaedra, but to defeat an amorous rival. The play, whose unity of action is problematic, depends on multiple plot turns, and Pradon ultimately dispels the illusion of a possible reversibility of the action—created through Phaedra's maneuvers after the return of Theseus to oppose his suspicions against Hippolytus—by implementing consequential mistakes and misunderstandings.

Imitations of the last quarter of the century also offer a renewal of the progression of action, but in a quite different way. The authors construct a stalemate at the beginning of their pieces leading once again to an irreversibility of the progress of the action (which is not laid out at the opening):²³ the (meagre) Senecan material and additions are then dispersed throughout the play.²⁴ In all cases, there is a reversal for the one blocking the action, and the circumstances create an irreversible outcome beyond the character's control. While this change softens the personality of the characters, it allows for plot twists and surprises. Pathos, then, depends on the *coup de théâtre*, or on accident. In modern adaptations of Seneca, we find the schema of the Senecan dénouement

22 Theseus's marriage with Phaedra would constitute incest since he had previously been married to Ariadne, Phaedra's sister. Structurally, the incest cannot be acknowledged without bringing the play to an immediate end. However, that Theseus does not understand the veiled allusions to his marriage with Ariadne presupposes that he has forgotten her, which is hardly likely.

23 Especially in the *Troade* of Boyer and Pradon.

24 In Pradon, the inflexibility of Ulysses and Pyrrhus, combined with the strategies they use to recover the captive they love, leads to this impasse. In Boyer, the discovery of a political conspiracy fomented by Aegisthus drives Agamemnon to want to marry his captive, and his inflexibility toward Clytemnestra (a victim of this situation) causes a stalemate that leads to his murder. In Tuillerie, the situation is blocked from the outset by Hercules's desire to marry Iole. The insertion of Philoctetes as a love rival renews the action at the expense of its unity. In Dancourt, though, Philoctetes supports Hercules's bid to win Iole in the hopes of convincing Deianeira of his love for her. A stalling strategy governs the action and delays the use of magic.

extended through the creation of an irreversible outcome beneath an illusion of reversibility.

3.2.2 Construction of Modified Subjects by the 'Ancients'

Given the thinness of the Senecan material retained, playwrights expand their pieces, borrowing from ancient and modern texts. Through such borrowing and an emphasis on gore, Corneille, in his *Œdipe*, and Racine, in his *La Thébaïde*, influence the original subject and accentuate the violence of intrafamily relationships, thus conferring a thoroughly Senecan atmosphere to their works with the goal of recovering the true effects of tragedy (fear and pity). Corneille adds "the happy episode of Theseus and Dirce" and plays on the possible interpretations of the oracles. Accordingly, the theme of political legitimacy develops from a concern to combine politics and love: it offers the spectacle of the conversion of a tyrant and the dissociation of divine guilt (endorsed by Jocasta), as well as that of political guilt, assumed by Oedipus who, discovering that he usurped power, blinds himself to redeem himself. By focusing on the fratricidal struggle, and thus distancing himself from his predecessor, Rotrou, Racine synthesizes diverse classical and modern elements. He introduces the blood motif, through oracles variously interpreted, and superimposes two logics: the irrational, of blood, and the rational, of politics, which allow him to interlink violence. That the role of Creon in the fratricidal hatred or his love for Antigone mentioned in the last act raises a question of coherence does not change the nature of the subject, which is "*le sujet le plus tragique de l'Antiquité*" (119) in the eyes of the author.

If they recover a wholly Senecan atmosphere, do Corneille and Racine return to a stasis of action? Corneille manages a much slower discovery of his own guilt by Oedipus through the intervention of a secondary episode that delays the investigation. However, the effect of the announcement, linked with the secondary episode, gives only the illusion of reversibility of action. Racine, in *La Thébaïde*, delays the deaths by highlighting political conflict to multiply encounters between characters. However, the play with the meaning of the oracles reinforces the ineluctable character of the progression of action: although dormant in the opening of the play, irrational logic (the visceral hatred between the two brothers, for which Jocasta is responsible) is present from the start. Certainly little mentioned, Seneca leaves his mark on both playwrights, especially in the disposition of action, even if the changes redeploy pathos, with more variety in Corneille than in Racine. It is with *Phèdre et Hippolyte* that Racine truly transforms the Senecan scheme. Like the *Thébaïde*, it combines ancient and modern sources; innovations concern the design of the characters: Phaedra is a character neither totally good nor

totally evil, possessed by an awareness of the power of love that borders on an interiorized transcendence. Finally, in line with modern adapters, Racine makes Hippolytus in love with Aricia, which facilitates the introduction of a political dimension to the tragedy. With regard to the Latin play, mentioned only in passing in the preface, Racine's version expands the material and introduces a reversal of action linked to his differing conception of the characters. Rather than unveiling the clash of two irreconcilable mythological characters, the play breaks with Senecan stasis, offering a progression based on the ability or inability of characters to admit the monstrous. Racine situates pathos in uncontrolled speech. He stands apart from Longepierre, who takes up Medea at the end of the century. Longepierre does not contaminate sources: while he does not retain all Senecan matter, he amplifies certain selected elements and bends the subject of his play to a private dimension. Unlike Corneille in his *Médée*, he does not confer political ambition on Jason, and Medea seems the victim of a marital plot (as the marriage between Jason and Creusa is not yet decided at the opening of the piece): divorce imposed as a means of dispossessing her children. The piece still differs from the Latin model in its more progressive action, linked to the conclusion of the marriage in the first act and the preparations for revenge in the third and fourth acts. By arranging more frequent meetings between characters and a false reversal, Longepierre builds a gradual crescendo of Medea's determination, with accompanying pathos. Thus, despite the thinness of the retained material and the changes made by Corneille, Racine, and Longepierre, Seneca still leaves his mark on their tragedies, albeit covertly.

3.3 *Passions and Characters: Renewal and Disappearance of Seneca*

The plays of the years 1645 to 1677 show a renewed typology. Certain characters remain dominated by their pathos, whose blackness is often reinforced, as in the cases of Phaedra (Bidar, Pradon), Creon (*La Thébaïde*) and Oedipus (Corneille). Along with this recovery of Senecan traits, playwrights transfer certain motifs to other characters²⁵ and add a gallant dimension that creates new types embodying a renewed heroism.²⁶ If the epic dimension is preserved and nuanced, heroes are touched by a love following a heroic ideal based on the combination of amorous exploits associated with love conceived within the bonds of marriage: an ideal whose characters are only more or less degraded avatars. Theseus becomes a gallant who can sink into romantic fury, especially

25 While Phaedra plays a black role in Pradon's piece, Gilbert and Racine transfer her corruption to the nurse.

26 This is the case for Theseus (Corneille) and for Hippolytus in the adaptations of Phaedra.

in Bidar. In the face of this heroism, one encounters a broken monolith where pathos and ethos clash, the latter winning at the end of the play, especially in Dirce and Jocasta in Corneille's *Œdipe*. Such a relation appears in Gilbert's Phaedra, but at the expense of the mythological credibility, and it is the ethos that leads to the crime,²⁷ as is the case for Hippolytus. Racine, internalizing this impossible conciliation, offers a new regime where pathos subverts ethos in a torn and guilty conscience.

Such transformations lead to a renewed expression of passions. In *Œdipe* and *La Thébaïde*, rare monologues and dramatic confrontations reveal a dominant trait, as in Seneca. However, Bidar, Pradon, and Gilbert, in their adaptations of Phaedra, offer a more complex unveiling. Manipulation of language, masking, falsehood and misconception about the trappings of passion—all fruit of the renewed dramatic disposition of the period—contribute to a gradual unveiling removed from Senecan aesthetics. Finally, the *Phèdre et Hippolyte* of Racine, offering a singular regime of ethos and pathos, replaces interpersonal confrontation with inner conflict that undermines the main characters and finds expression in the tirade of the protagonist that interiorizes the monologue.

Stylistics change under the influence of Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux's translation of Longinus's *On the Sublime*, published in 1674. Thus, in modern adaptations of the Phaedra myth, the frenzied rant, always present, becomes more nuanced and natural. In Racine, a partisan of the Ancients, the Senecan lyricism, shorn of its mythological and ornamental erudition, still makes its mark on *La Thébaïde*, but inclines toward a gallant tone with the couple Antigone-Haemon, particularly in the varied stances of Antigone. In his *Phèdre et Hippolyte*, he turns to more natural and varying modes of lamentation, and his Phaedra does not reach the virulence of the Senecan character. Corneille stands apart from this practice. If he introduces a musical mode in the Theseus-Dirce couple, he opts for a sublime silence when Jocasta understands the identity of Oedipus, after the example of Ajax's silence in the *nekyia* of the *Odyssey* praised by Longinus's treatise. Beyond the nuanced borrowing of the lyric functions of Senecan language, the playwrights of the period reinvest the language of the body that marks the Latin works. In the modern adaptations of Phaedra, if the mentions of cold, heat, and blood trail off, those of tears, sighs, and complaints take a more consequential place. From the spontaneous expression of an interiority, they become a genuine mute eloquence, a double discourse. In Corneille and Racine, the sighs are certainly present, but their

27 Gilbert makes Phaedra a virtuous character who struggles against incest (transferred to the character of Theseus).

uses of the body differ. Virtually absent in Corneille, the body finds expression in Racine, and is virtually omnipresent in *Phèdre et Hippolyte*: Racine reprises Seneca on this point, albeit in a more natural way and bordering on the sublime. Finally, the visualization of horror through language, another feature of Senecan dramatic style, still leaves its mark. It is concentrated in the report of the death of Hippolytus in the modern adapters of the myth, who do not hesitate to amplify and poeticize in order to heighten pathos. Racine, for example, in *Phèdre et Hippolyte*, through complex expression of the monstrous via hypotyposis and hyperbole, draws on Senecan aesthetics in a more varied way than in *La Thébaïde*, where the motif of blood dominates. Corneille, in contrast, is much more restrained and refrains from visual amplification.

French plays between 1645 and 1677, while still marked by the Senecan seal, stray farther and farther from the Latin dramatist, and his influence continues to fade in the last quarter of the century under the dictates of propriety, which are noticeable in the softening of victims, oppressors, and those in the grip of *furor* between 1677 and 1694. While the Senecan *furor* is still perceptible in the *furor-dolor* nexus, characters, such as Andromache in Pradon's *La Troade*, enlist outside help to revive the *dolor*. In addition, if the characters of Agamemnon, Pyrrhus, Hercules, and Jason embody oppression, their characters are softened. They are not immune to love; the character of Hercules does not kill Lichas in the works of La Tuillerie and Dancourt; in Boyer, Pyrrhus seeks external examples to define his cruelty, which implies that his mythological cruelty is not sufficient; and in *La Troade* of Pradon, because of the dramatic structure, the characters, now capable of a reversal, are not responsible for the death of Astyanax and Polyxena: a real distortion of their mythological characters. If a few raving women like Medea (Longepierre) and Deianeira (La Tuillerie, Dancourt) vent their furor and pain in isolated accents, playwrights have, in truth, lent them a will to appear angry, thus revealing a waning of the characters' mythological nature. It is with that view that Deianeira solicits the aid of Phenice (in La Tuillerie), or of Thamira (in Dancourt), who are asked to recount Hercules's infidelities in order to stoke her anger. The buildup of her rage is therefore more progressive, and thus the character is a softened version of the Senecan prototype.

This softening is due to the change of relations between ethos and pathos. In separating the epic from the romantic, the playwrights propose a heroism that no longer rests on a combination of valorous exploits and love within wedlock, as it had in the adaptations of the previous period. Glory becomes questionable, and is only a first step before striving for a love that overrides everything, despite pre-existing bonds. Thus, Hercules is no longer a peacemaker, but a destroyer in the works of La Tuillerie and Dancourt.

Similarly, the glory of Agamemnon appears tainted with violence in the eyes of his own son in Boyer's piece. This same fame, and hence the attainment of glory through military exploits, are questioned by the authors themselves. The primacy accorded to love leads to a conception of heroism not based on self-improvement, and if there is a political dimension, it is placed at the service of feelings. In the *Troade* of Pradon, we see the ethics of greatness disappear, and pride in rank does not go before more human sentiments. Similarly, in Boyer, La Tuillerie, and Dancourt the characters of Agamemnon and Hercules refuse to consider their duties when they loudly affirm their desire to freely love and marry their captives. Finally, the inglorious death of Hercules—as the apotheosis is retracted in La Tuillerie and Dancourt—confirms the changes in the relationship between ethos and pathos that efface the Senecan presence. A modern hero emerges who supplants the mythological characters of the Latin drama, not without difficulty in terms of the consistency of the characterization. This transformation alters the writing of feelings. If Longepierre, a partisan of the Ancients, seems nearest his model, he has erased the excess in favor of the sweeter melody of gallant sentiments shared by Jason and Creusa. In Boyer, Pradon, La Tuillerie and Dancourt, the key Senecan stylistic devices wane: furious songs and laments, although still present, are watered down, and the language of the body practically disappears from the French plays.

At the end of the century, the imprint of Seneca therefore vanishes. The constitution of genres clearly defined by theorists and the maturity of a literature that boasts its own national models leads to the emancipation of playwrights from Seneca, who had been a founding father of tragedy in France.

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Germany and the Netherlands: Tragic Seneca in Scholarship and on Stage

Joachim Harst

Both as philosopher and as writer of tragedies, the importance of Seneca in the baroque age cannot be overestimated. Several reasons contribute to his rise in literary influence: While Seneca's works have been edited and published before, the number of editions—often with comprehensive commentaries—increases significantly from the seventeenth century onwards; at the same time, due to a shift in rhetorical sensibility, Seneca's 'baroque' style in general, and his tragedies in particular, become a popular model for imitation. More importantly, on the level of content, Seneca's Stoic philosophy of constancy is felt to be close to contemporary Christian religiosity, and thus influences not only Neo-Stoic treatises of the time, but also the increasing number of religious plays (for a general account, cf. Torre 2015). In fact, the baroque age's theatrical worldview—the metaphor of the world-theater is a commonplace of the time—is another aspect of the affinity between Seneca and the baroque: Seneca, too, frequently refers to the world as '*spectaculum*,' in which the Stoic plays an exemplary role, and his tragedies self-consciously exhibit themselves as theater (cf. Littlewood 2015). Less than two centuries later, however, precisely this theatricality was the main criticism of Gottsched (*Critische Dichtkunst*, 1731) and Lessing (*Laokoon*, 1766) in trying to establish a new, 'bourgeois' form of tragedy. But even as a negative archetype, Seneca still embodied the 'baroque' theater that these authors wanted to overcome.

While theatricality is an important aspect of Seneca's work, it has not yet been studied as a reason for his general influence on the baroque age and its theater. Besides important monographs that highlight Seneca's importance for early modern philosophical and political thought (Abel 1978; Oestreich 1989; Stacey 2015), those which focus on baroque tragedy are mostly concerned with its Christianization of Stoic doctrine (see, for example, Schings 1966), as if theater were just another form of philosophy. Those studies, in turn, which deal with the reception of Seneca's tragedies, tend to downplay the theatrical '*Weltanschauung*' built into their dramatic and rhetorical

structure.¹ This paper, in contrast, will proceed from the assumption that there is also a theatrical side to Seneca's philosophy (§1), which can be detected in its focus on exemplarity, its dramatic rhetoric, and its metaphors of spectatorship. The ostentatious stance of Seneca's diction is controversially discussed in baroque philology, but also present in contemporary Neo-Stoic treatises, which often imitate Seneca's theatrical style more closely than his philosophy—so that the rhetorical exemplarity of Seneca outplays his doctrinal leadership (§2). Furthermore, Neo-Stoicism also influences numerous attempts in baroque poetics, while vernacular poets strive to create a new dramatic language by imitating Seneca's diction. However, since the most important subjects of contemporary baroque theater were history and Christian religion instead of ancient myth, Senecan theatricality also informs, and to some extent transforms, baroque religiosity. On the baroque stage, Jesus is often portrayed as a Stoic hero, while the pain of torture and martyrdom is depicted as a necessary step towards heaven (§3). Finally, besides being a philosophical and rhetorical archetype, Seneca himself also embodies a certain kind of tragic theater. There are some important baroque plays, for instance, which reflect upon their status as tragedies by staging Seneca as a historical person or by alluding to him by way of analogy and quotation (§4).

1 Theatricality in Seneca

The relationship between Seneca's philosophical writings and his tragedies has been under much discussion; while some scholars argue that his dramas contradict or at least attenuate the philosopher's claims to Stoic rationality and sovereignty (Dingel 1974), many tend to understand his tragedies as cautionary fables about the destructive force of irrational passions. In this sense, Staley understands Seneca's tragedies as "case studies in the ways in which human misjudgments (this is what the passions are for the Stoics) produce misfortune" (Staley 2010, 9).² Without deciding this question here,³ it is interesting to note that both approaches read the tragedies through the lens of Seneca's Stoic writings, thus "applying Seneca's philosophy directly to his plays" (Braden 1985, 28)—as if the interpreter's task was to translate the poetic work to a

1 The most important studies on the reception of Seneca (and esp. his tragedies) in Germany and the Netherlands are: Trillitzsch 1971; Stachel 1907; Worp 1977; Liebermann 1978; Asmuth 1978; as well as the contributions in Jacquot 1964.

2 For a more differentiated account see Chaumartin 2014, Fischer 2014, and Star, this volume.

3 For a thorough discussion of this problem see chapter "Seneca tragicus and Stoicism."

philosophical statement. However, Staley remarks that “for Seneca and the Stoics, tragedy was not just a literary form but also a metaphor for life in which all the world was a ‘stage’” (10; cf. also Christian 1987). In the following, I would like to briefly point out some important aspects of theatricality that Seneca’s prose and poetry have in common in order to show that there is a ‘tragic’ side to his philosophy which will be of interest for his baroque reception.

It is well known that the style of Seneca’s philosophical treatises, with its interjections, personifications, and apostrophes, owes much to the rhetoric of the diatribe, a genre that makes ample use of “dramatic” techniques (Hijmans 1966, 240; see also Traina 1987). The treatise *De providentia* for example, which is especially interesting in this context, begins with Seneca *acting* as the gods’ advocate in a fictional lawsuit (*causam deorum agam*; “I shall be pleading the cause of the gods,” 1.1), and ends with an imaginary apology of god himself (6.3–9); in its center, personified ‘fortune’ is granted a speech as well (3.3). More importantly, also on the level of content, the idea of theater and spectatorship is always at hand: the Stoic has to set an example before his contemporaries by acting in a self-controlled way, and his fight with fortune—which Seneca compares to gladiatorial combat—is understood as a ‘*spectaculum*’ before a divine audience (2.7–8). As a proof to his claims, Seneca cites the example of Cato’s suicide and ‘stages’ his last words in tragic diction:⁴ this heroic deed, he claims, was such a beautiful sight for the gods, that they insisted on seeing it twice (2.12): Since Cato did not die from the wound he inflicted himself with a sword, he had to “lead his soul to freedom with his own hands.”⁵ Such a death, Seneca assures us, “consecrates” the life of a wise man. If, however, suicide is the ultimate proof of Stoic sovereignty, its ostentatious *staging* shows that it remains dependent on an audience.⁶ And even if there is no external spectator, Seneca advises self-observation and self-exemplification as a *speculator sui* (*De ira*, 3.36.2; cf. Ker 2009a, esp. 176–182). Relying on the approving gaze of the other and on the critical gaze of itself, “it is fair to say that Seneca’s is a performative self” (Bartsch and Wray 2009, 4), if not a theatrical one.⁷

4 The phrase with which Seneca’s Cato exhorts himself to suicide (*aggredere, anime, diu meditatatum opus*; “essay, my soul, the task long planned,” 2.10) and his referral to himself in the third person (*Cato qua exeat habet*, “yet Cato has a way of escape,” etc.) are stock elements of Seneca’s tragedies.

5 *illam sanctissimam animam [. . .] manu educit* (1.11–12). Seneca, on his part, will outdo Cato by killing himself three times.

6 Cf. Braden 1985, 27; for Cato’s exemplary role in Seneca, see also Amis 2009, 132–135; Ker 2009.

7 For “theater and theatricality in Seneca’s world, see Littlewood 2015.

The affinity between Stoic philosophy and tragic theater is furthermore highlighted by another example. Illustrating how the Stoic in his fight against fortune “ascends” to the higher regions of virtue (5.9–10), Seneca quotes Ovid’s story of Phaethon, but adds a final line full of heroic pathos: *libet illic stare*, the son proudly answers his frightened father, *ubi ipse Sol trepidat* (“I long to stand aloft where even the Sun-god quakes with fear,” 5.11). Thus, Seneca inscribes the central Stoic notion of ‘standing’ into the Ovidian myth; on the other hand, as Seneca must have been well aware, the myth doesn’t end with Phaethon’s heroic stance, but with his ineluctable downfall that engulfs the world in apocalyptic fire. If Seneca still maintains that manly virtue reveals itself in Phaethon (5.11), then this virtue is dangerously close to hubris, and Stoic sovereignty can only prove itself in ultimate (self-)destruction: Seneca’s choice of example suggests that there is a ‘tragic’ side to the Stoic hero.⁸ Hence, it doesn’t astonish much if Phaethon’s myth is quoted again in the (Pseudo-) Senecan *Hercules Oetaeus* in order to illustrate the tragic fate of “those who avoid the middle path” (675)—even if it leads, as in the case of Hercules, to an exemplary, martyr-like death and apotheosis.⁹

The ‘tragic’ structure of rising and falling, evident in the course of Phaethon’s chariot, is exemplary for many of Seneca’s tragedies and explicitly named in the prologue of *Trojan Women* (v. 1–6), a play that stages the sacrificial deaths of Polyxena and Astyanax. However, precisely by insisting upon downfall and death as ‘tragic’ elements, the Senecan adaptations differ from their Greek models: For Seneca, ‘tragedy’ always implies a conscious imitation and exhibition of tragedy as a genre, so that his dramas also express “Seneca’s sense of the impossibility of recreating the Attic form in a post-classical age” (Boyle 1997, 112).¹⁰ One of the many aspects of this problematic relationship between Greek and Roman tragedy is the role of the ‘tragic’ death, which is often displayed as a martyr-like sacrifice: In Seneca, it is almost as if the protagonists knew from the start that they have to die in order to fulfill the laws of the genre.

This observation is all the more remarkable, since Seneca staged his own death in a similar way. According to Tacitus’s report (*Annals* 15.60–64), Seneca killed himself at Nero’s request without any complaints, proving his Stoic faith with his death: this, he allegedly said, should serve his ‘audience’ as an

8 For a comprehensive analysis of the relation between Stoicism and apocalyptic (self-)destruction see Braden 1985.

9 In a similar vein, Phaethon is quoted by the chorus at *Medea* 599–602; furthermore, in *Phaedra* Hippolytos, another exemplary figure of Stoic self-sovereignty, is compared to Phaethon when he falls from his chariot (1090–1092).

10 Cf. *ibid.*, 112–137; Harst 2012, 157–168.

imago vitae, a vivid representation of his life and teachings (cf. Ker 2009). Furthermore, Seneca outdid the spectacle of Cato's death, since he had to make three attempts before he succeeded—one of which was to drink the cup of hemlock, which also was administered to Socrates. In imitating Socrates's death, however, Seneca also repeats a gesture that later has been understood as the "end" of tragedy: "As a parody of tragedy, the martyr-drama originates in the death of Socrates. And here, just as so often, the parody of a genre announces its end" ("*Im sterbenden Sokrates ist das Märtyrerdrama als Parodie der Tragödie entsprungen. Und hier wie so oft zeigt die Parodie einer Form deren Ende an,*" Benjamin 1991, 292). Just like Socrates, Seneca stages his death as a sacrifice for his faith—which is one reason why he can be later portrayed as a pseudo-Christian martyr. At the same time, however, this self-conscious martyrdom indicates a transformation of tragedy. If Seneca becomes a figure for 'tragic' theater in the seventeenth century, then, this also implies a problematic relation of baroque theater to 'tragedy.' In baroque philology and philosophy, as I will discuss in the following section, praise for Seneca's 'tragic' vigor goes together with a criticism of the hollow theatricality of his sentences.

2 Tragic Seneca in Baroque Scholarship: From Philology to Philosophy (and Back)

To discuss 'tragic Seneca' in baroque scholarship raises at least two difficulties: on the one hand, academic disciplines such as philology, rhetoric, and philosophy were not as clearly differentiated as they are today; the rhetorical notion of *imitatio*, for example, was not only applicable to literary texts, but also to philosophical treatises—every kind of writing had to orient itself at certain rules, e.g. conventions of a genre or stylistic traits of an author. How exactly these rules are to be defined depends upon the chosen paradigm (cf. Barner 1970, 59–67); while one can detect a shift towards 'silver latinity' (e.g., Seneca and Tacitus) at the end of the sixteenth century (cf. Mouchel 1990), the corpus of these authors had not yet been definitely established at the time, so that the paradigm itself remained flexible to a certain extent. If rhetoric thus depends upon philology, however, the reverse statement is also true: questions of style play an important role in determining the authenticity of ancient texts. This is where the second difficulty comes in: authenticity and authorship of many texts transmitted under Seneca's name were still under discussion in the sixteenth and seventeenth century; in addition, resulting from an ancient misunderstanding, contemporary philologists distinguish between at least two Senecas—the philosopher or the tragic poet—and often

even ascribe the tragedies to two or more authors, based on stylistic differences (cf. Trillitzsch 1978). Thus, the difficulty in distinguishing between *Seneca philosophus* and *Seneca tragicus* I have mentioned above is reflected by philological attempts to ascertain the authorship of Seneca's corpus. If Seneca becomes the paradigm to imitate, then, this name denotes a multiplicity of authors (and styles).

While there are almost countless Seneca editions in the baroque age,¹¹ the example of Justus Lipsius may demonstrate the complexity of the discussion. Lipsius, one of the most influential scholars of his time, published philological editions of almost every important Latin author, but he also wrote popular philosophical treatises. He taught at Leiden University, which was one of the most important intellectual centers of the time (cf. Enenkel 1997). In his 1588 *Animadversiones in tragoedias quae L. Annaeo Seneca tribuuntur* (*Remarks on the tragedies that are attributed to L. Annaeus Seneca*), a commentary that he initially wrote for an edition of Seneca's tragedies, Lipsius posits no less than four authors for the dramas (4).¹² Based on the different stylistic quality of the plays, he argues that *Phoenician Women* is the best of all Senecan tragedies, and thus may even have been written in the Augustan age: *nihil usquam iuvenile, arcessitum, fucatum. phrasis & verba lecta: sententiarum mira & inopinata acumina* ("there is nothing juvenile, far-fetched, or artificial about them; the phrases and words are well-chosen, and the acuteness of the sentences is astonishing and surprising," 6); *Octavia*, on the other hand, seems to be rather puerile in style, and thus must have been written by another, if unknown, author (7). With complete confidence in his stylistic sensibility, Lipsius thus posits two authors for whom there is, as he himself admits, no further textual evidence. In general, only two tragedies, *Medea* and *Thebais*, meet with his complete approval; the others may sometimes be of tragic grandeur, but also appear somewhat artificial and sententious: *Iam sententiae probae, acutae, interdum ad miraculum. sed none saepe & sententiolae?* ("there are some good, acute, and sometimes even admirable sentences; but are they often not also sententious?" 8) It seems to Lipsius that the tragedies bear the mark of their time, *cui Scholasticum & Declamatorium hoc genus ita placuit, ut operum omnium (Fabii verba sunt) solam virtutem Sententias putarent* ("that enjoyed this scholastic and declamatory genre to such an extent that—these are the words of Quintilian—they deemed the only virtue of this whole work

11 Among others, important editions are: Martín Delrío (1576), Justus Lipsius (1588), Martín Delrío (1593), Daniel Heinsius and Joseph Scaliger (1611), Thomas Farnabius (1613), Petrus Scriverius (1621), Johann Friedrich Gronovius (1661).

12 For a philological appraisal of Lipsius's textual criticism see Zaninotte 1996.

the sentences" 8). This judgment, however, is not meant to criticize the poet, but to advise the reader and to train his rhetorical taste (8).

In his ambivalent judgment on Seneca's 'declamatory' style, Lipsius had an important predecessor: Erasmus of Rotterdam, who edited both Seneca's tragedies (1514) and his philosophical writings (1515 and 1529), stated with respect to *Seneca philosophus* that his style is *affectibus tragicis vehemens* ("vigorous of tragic affects");¹³ on the other hand, Erasmus criticizes Seneca's declamatory pathos whenever he writes about 'sublime' topics such as the Stoic's contempt for death and his praise of suicide: *videtur ostentare grandiloquentiam suam, et nescio quid tragicum spirare* ("he seems to boast of his grandiloquence, and to be bloated with I don't know what tragic," *ibid.*, 35, l. 419f.) Erasmus further noted Seneca's concise, asyndetic, and hence often obscure style, as well as the abundance of *sententiae*—both characteristics further emphasize the declamatory—but concludes that Seneca's language exhorts the reader to an ethical stance in an exceptionally forceful way (Trillitzsch 1965, 290). Lipsius, who considered himself to continue the philological work of Erasmus by publishing his own edition of Seneca's *Opera Omnia* (cf. i; Papy 2002, 12), joins him in his prefatory *Iudicium super Seneca*, in which he praises Seneca's style "for the priority it gives to direct exhortation and the use of *sententiae* in philosophical meditation" (Papy 2002, 30; cf. pp. viii–x). "It was precisely this sententious style, this *sermo*—real or internal—which formed the unique stimulus to virtue and the solid basis for a reflection upon Stoic doctrines" (Papy 2002, 30). Defending Seneca against the critique of Aulus Gellius (*Noctes Atticae* 12,2), Lipsius once more compares his style to theater and tragedy: While Gellius's plain diction seems to imitate comedy, *noster* [Seneca] *in viâ altâ & aliâ, in cothurno est* ("Seneca travels on another, a higher road, he wears the cothurn," xj). In short, the style of *Seneca philosophus* wavers between tragic vigor and theatrical pomp.

As far as Seneca's notorious obscurity is concerned, Lipsius is confident that his edition helps to clarify what the philosopher wanted to say: *Nos ordinavimus, coniunximus, disiunximus, ut res erat, et praeter lucem sententiae, quam largiter infundimus, faciem eloquentiae reddidimus, uberis illius et profluentis* ("I put the words in their proper order, separating or joining them as the content required. Besides restoring light—which I poured in generously—to the sentences [to the meaning], I restored the appearance of the style, which is rich and fluent," ij).¹⁴ Indeed, a comparison between Erasmus's and Lipsius's

13 Preface to the edition of 1529, edited in Erasmus of Rotterdam 1992, vol. 5, Ep. 2091, p. 32, l. 306f. For Erasmus's critique of Seneca's style see Trillitzsch 1965, 286–291.

14 Cf. Papy 2002, 25.

editions shows that the latter's "overzealous punctuation" transforms Seneca's language significantly (Papy 2002, 25)—and Lipsius himself admits that before his emendations, Seneca's style indeed resembled, as Caligula supposedly said, "a circular race-track without a finish line" (*arena sine calce*; cf. ij and vj). Style, that is to say, is never objectively given; while a preconceived notion of an author's style governs the philologist's attitude towards the text (authorship/authenticity), its "appearance" also is an after-effect of his "restoration" of the text. Only then can it be imitated and its philosophical value estimated. As Lipsius himself states in another context: *Ego e Philologia Philosophia feci* ("From philology I have made philosophy," cited in Papy 2002, 32).¹⁵

The proud claim to have turned philology into philosophy could also serve as a motto for Lipsius's most famous Neo-Stoic treatise *De Constantia* (Antwerp 1584). Already the title indicates that Lipsius is concerned with a Senecan topic (*De Constantia sapientis*), arguing that pain and suffering do not contradict divine providence, but should be taken as exercises in constancy. Besides this philosophical 'imitation,' Lipsius's treatise also follows Seneca on a 'philological,' that is stylistic, level: just as Seneca, he molds his Neo-Stoic doctrine into a narrated dialogue that alternates between placid teaching and passionate exhortation, vivified by visual, if often incoherent, examples and a predilection for terrifying images; furthermore, Lipsius imitates Seneca's concise and asyndetic diction, favoring antithetical structures and paronomastic wordplay, but gives way to rather 'declamatory' pomp whenever he touches upon 'sublime' topics.¹⁶ Thus, it does not astonish much that there is a theatrical ring to Lipsius's praise of constancy (17):

Tu eripe tantum & erige te, & nauim flecte ad hunc portum: vbi securitas, vbi pax habitat: in quo perfugium asylumque à turbis & à curis. Quem si bona fide semel tenueris: non turbet solùm patria tua sed ruat, stabis ipse inconcussus. Nimbi circùm te cadant & fulmina & tempestas: clamabis vera magnaue voce,—mediis tranquillus in vndis.¹⁷

¹⁵ Cf. Papy 2008, 58.

¹⁶ Cf. Papy 2008. Lipsius's own style, designed in close imitation of Seneca, became in turn a model for the 'anticiceronian movement' of the seventeenth century (Croll 1966).

¹⁷ "You should free and raise up yourself, and steer the course of your ship unto this port, where peace and security dwell; in which there is a refuge and a sanctuary from troubles and perplexities. And if you hold fast to it in good faith, should your country not only totter, but fall into ruins, you yourself will stand unshaken. When tempests and thunderbolts fall about you, you will cry out with as true, as loud a voice:—*in the midst of the waves I stand secure.*"

Just as Lipsius's style obviously aims at an audience, the shouting voice of his exemplary Stoic reveals that in his sovereign independence, he still imagines himself to be watched. And of course he is right, for also in Lipsius, the notion of the world-theater is the last resort of providence: Discussing the apparent injustice of the world—the Bad enjoy good fortune, while the Good have to suffer—Lipsius compares God to a tragic poet; just as Atreus or Thyestes, he says, appear as powerful tyrants in the first acts of a tragedy, but suffer their deserved downfall in the last, the Unjust will be punished for their doings when the show draws to a close: *Scæna hæc mox sanguine diffluet, & voluentur in eo purpureæ istæ auratæque vestes. Bonus enim ille noster poëta est, nec temere migrabit Tragædiæ suæ leges* ("This scene shall shortly flow with blood, and the those robes of gold and purple shall be rolled in it. For he is a good poet, and will not rashly exceed the laws of his tragedy," 117). If Lipsius's treatise can be understood as an imitation of Seneca, then, it also adapts to Seneca's theatricality—both on the level of diction and of content. This is consciously underscored by his connecting the general notion of world-theater with the Senecan tragedy *Thyestes*, but it also entails a significant problem for baroque's Christianized stoicism: in a particularly morbid turn, the cruelty of the wordly tragedy proves the benignity of the "poet." Also in this aspect, Lipsius's 'own' Senecan style, in turn, becomes a paradigm that is imitated throughout Europe (Croll 1966).

Now, as Lipsius's philological and philosophical imitation of Seneca becomes popular, it reinscribes itself in later editions of the tragedies. Martín Delrío's 1593 *Syntagma tragoediae latinae* is a particularly interesting case (cf. Dreano 1936). The Jesuit Delrío is one of the few philologists of the time who are convinced of the identity of *Seneca philosophus* and *Seneca tragicus*; in his commentary, he ascribes nine tragedies to the philosopher and explains many passages by referring to Seneca's philosophical prose, drawing attention to *sententiae* whose moral he admires, while unmasking others that he deemed to propagate unacceptable doctrines (Mayer 1994, 160). In a prolix commentary to the 'atheistic' chorus of *Trojan Women* (371–408), for example, he refutes the mortality of the soul and unfolds the philosophical tradition on immortality on twelve pages (cf. Dreano 1936, 81); in total, his commentary appears more as an encyclopedia of contemporary knowledge than as a strictly philological work. At some points, moreover, it seems that he comments less upon Seneca than on Lipsius, to whom he dedicated parts of his edition (Mayer 1994, 157, n. 34); especially his notes on "pity" and "fate" seem to be involved in discussions from *De Constantia*, in which Lipsius takes pains to harmonize Stoic and Christian notions (cf. Mayer 1994, 163–165). While Delrío's 'Lipsian' reading of Seneca is recirculated—some of his notes reappear in Farnaby's and later

variorum editions (cf. *ibid.*, 168–170)—Heinsius criticizes Lipsius quite harshly in his edition of 1611 (*L. Annaei Senecae et aliorum tragoediae serio emendatae*): Lipsius's high praise for *Phoenician Women*, he says, is not caused by its literary merits, but by the fact that the play presents Stoic wisdom in the popular form of acute *sententiae* (519); from a literary viewpoint, however, the play is not even a real tragedy, but a *fabula ociosi declamatoris* ("fable made by a boring rhetor," 513).¹⁸ Heinsius's criticism is all the more penetrating, as it reverses Lipsius's claim to have turned philology into philosophy: according to Heinsius, Lipsius's philological judgment is contaminated by his predilection for Stoic philosophy; a philosophy, moreover, which may dupe the masses in a theater, but does not satisfy a real intellectual. Aristotle, Heinsius mockingly remarks, called this kind of philosophizing *theatri imbecillitas* ("weakness of the theater [in the sense of audience]," 519).¹⁹ Lipsius, that is to say, fell into the trap of Senecan theatricality.

Notwithstanding Heinsius's criticism, Lipsius's Seneca editions are reprinted throughout the seventeenth century. Since 1615, his *Senecae Opera* are adorned with an engraving after Rubens's *Death of Seneca* (1611): The philosopher, whose veins have been opened, stands in a bathtub and continues to teach, gazing at heaven, until he dies. Looking up to this exemplary *imago vitae*, which will be copied in almost all later Seneca editions, the reader is exhorted to follow in Lipsius's footsteps and to fortify himself with "wisdom's antidote against the afflictions of the time" ("*Lipsium [...] sequere; atque efficaci Sapientiae antidoto adversus laetales aevi huius morbos munitus*"; preface to *Senecae Opera*, no page number). At the same time, however, it also shows that Seneca's writings are read with a view to his martyr-like death—which makes him (his tragedies, his philosophy and his teachings) so adaptable for Christian thinking in general and baroque (religious) theater in particular (Hess 1981).²⁰

18 Cf. Loos 2000, 425.

19 Cf. Aristotle, *Poetics* 1453a34: *διὰ τὴν τὸν θεάτρῳ ἀσθένειαν*.

20 In his *De vita et scriptis Senecae*, Lipsius writes that Seneca lived and died so piously that he was considered "one of us" by many early Christians (xx). Although he considers the correspondence between Seneca and St. Paul as spurious, Lipsius doesn't dare to rule out the possibility that the Stoic and the Christian wrote to each other (xxv).—For the influence of Seneca on Rubens in general see Paratore 1967.

3 Tragic Seneca in Baroque Scholarship: Rhetoric and Poetics

These interferences between philology and philosophy also inform contemporary rhetoric and poetics. In fact, Silesian poet Martin Opitz's translation of *Trojan Women* (1625)—a play that was considered one of the best Senecan tragedies at the time (Asmuth 1978, 246)—may appear as the dramatic counterpart to Lipsius's *De constantia*. Writing at the outset of the Thirty Years' War, Opitz compares the fate of his native country with the devastation of Troy as represented in *Trojan Women*; very much like Lipsius, he seeks consolation in studying Seneca, and accordingly understands tragedy in general as an example of Stoic constancy in times of war (cf. Liebermann 1978, 393–398; Schings 1974). In the poetological preface to his translation, Opitz generalizes this notion and claims that tragedy in general fosters constancy: "*Solche Beständigkeit aber wird vns durch Beschawung der Mißligkeit des menschlichen Lebens in den Tragödien zuförderst eingepflanzt*" ("constancy is first of all implanted in us by contemplating human life's misery in tragedies," *Vorrede*). Indeed, *Trojan Women* may be Seneca's tragedy that best lends itself to such an interpretation, for it deals with the Stoic deaths of Polyxena and Astyanax, the last heir to the Trojan throne; furthermore, it doesn't stage these deaths directly, but has them reported to the chorus of Trojan women, that serves as an exemplary audience within the play. Lacking almost any action, the play's atmosphere is suffused with the chorus's elegiac lamentations; the tragedy thus stages "the contemplation of human life's misery" in a double sense—it "draws attention to its status both as theatre and as *imago vitae*" (Boyle 1997, 121). Also besides his Neo-Stoic reading, Opitz's choice of *Trojan Women* as a paradigm for tragedy is significant insofar as it stands for a theater less interested in action than in elegiac contemplation, a theatrical 'mode' especially important to religious drama and martyr-plays.²¹

Opitz's translation, however, was more than an act of reverence to the Stoic Seneca. It was also an exercise in rhetorical imitation and thus part of Opitz's broader project of shaping German as a literary language by translation. As one of the first German translators since Luther, Opitz was just as much interested in form as in content;²² hence, his translation of *Trojan Women* was also meant to translate 'tragedy' as a genre, to create 'tragic diction' in German.

21 There are also important Dutch translations/adaptations of *Trojan Women*: Jacob Duym (*Spiegel des Hochmoets, wesende Troiados*, 1600) and Joost van den Vondel (*De Amsteldamsche Hecuba*, 1626). Opitz's poetological preface is echoed in Johann Rist's preface to his *Perseus* (1634) and Johann Klaj's preface to his *Herodes* (1645).

22 Cf. Zymner 2002.

Especially his choice of the (French) alexandrine as tragic meter was to be imitated by all baroque poets (Plard 1964, 233–235); a fact that is all the more remarkable, since the alexandrine, longer than the iambic trimeter, encourages a distorting ‘lengthening’ of Senecan *brevitas* (cf. *ibid.*, 236f.). Indeed, the most striking characteristics of Opitz’s tragic language are the replacement of asyndetic structures by causal explanations, circumstantial periphrases and arbitrary reduplication of terms (Stachel 1907, 186–202). At the same time, the two-fold structure of the alexandrine can be employed to successfully render Seneca’s numerous antithetical tropes. Both tendencies can be exemplified with reference to one of the play’s most important tropes, the identification of marriage and death (which is already a *topos* of Greek tragedy).²³ When Achilles’s ghost demands that Polyxena be sacrificed to him in a macabre act of marriage, Agamemnon objects: *facinus atrox caedis ut thalamos vocent,/ non patiar* (“that men should call foul murder marriage, I will not permit,” 289–290)—a line that Opitz expands by inserting an explanatory reflection: “*Ja daß der schnöde Mordt (mein Sinn/ was meinst du wol// Daß dis für Heyrath sey?) ein’ Heyraht heißen soll*” (“That disdainful murder (what kind of marriage could that be, my soul?) should be called marriage!” 351). But when Polyxena embraces death as marriage, since a life in chains means death to her (*mortem putabat illud, hoc thalamos putat*, “death she deemed that other, this, her bridal,” 948), Opitz even intensifies the antithetical figure: “*Das andre war ihr Todt/ Diß ist ihr Hochzeitsleben*” (“that was death to her, but this is married life,” 1149). Thus, Opitz’s tragic language prefigures the omnipresent antithetical structures of baroque theater (esp. the martyr plays will take up the tragic identification of death and marriage, giving it a Christian turn), but also often replaces the pathos of Seneca’s concise diction with the theatrical pomp of circumstantial formulations. In imitating Seneca, Opitz’s language develops a cumbersome theatricality of its own.²⁴

Opitz, however, was not the first to understand theater as an exercise in constancy. His prefatory remarks on tragedy are highly indebted to Heinsius’s reinterpretation of the Aristotelian *catharsis* in Neo-Stoic, and that is to say, Lipsian, terms: Tragedy’s goal, Heinsius declares, is to reduce sensibility and affects (*De tragoediae constitutione liber*, 1611/1643, c. 2).²⁵ Other aspects of Heinsius’s popular poetics are more in line with Aristotle; especially his analysis of the “complex” tragic structure and its elements (*peripeteia*, *anagnorisis*)

23 Cf. Rehm 1994.

24 See also Harst 2012b on Opitz’s translation of Sophocles’s *Antigone*.

25 Cf. Schings 1974, 535.

highlights the Aristotelian rationality of tragedy with unique clearness.²⁶ In their own writing of tragedies, however, even philologists like Heinsius preferred the “simple” fable in Seneca’s style.²⁷ It is as if they had J.C. Scaliger in mind, who defined tragedy primarily by its contents—*caedes, desperationes, suspendia* [...] (“murder, despair, suicide,” *Poetices libri*, 1561, l. 3, c. 97 [96], p. 144)—and argued that tragedy could even end well, “as long as it represents horrible things” (*modo intus sint res atroces*, *ibid.*, 145).²⁸

Especially this latter claim—for which *Hercules Oetaeus* may serve as proof—was important for the Dutch humanists’ attempts to write Neo-Latin tragedies with biblical contents, for they had to reconcile the tragic ‘fall’ with the Christian belief in salvation. The most important subject in this context was of course the passion of Christ, which Hugo Grotius endeavored to dramatize (*Christus Patiens*, 1608).²⁹ In treating his subject, Grotius could resort to the Greek play *Christos paschōn*, which recounted the passion in the form of reports delivered to the mother of Christ: Just as in *Trojan Women*, the ‘action’ is removed from the stage, and the ‘reaction’ of principal characters is put to the fore (cf. Parente 1985). Similarly, Grotius in his play presents the reaction of Peter, Judas, and Mary to Jesus’s imprisonment and death: “Since tragedy could not be based on the fate of the protagonist, Grotius evoked a tragic mood by recounting the lamentations of the Virgin, the apostles and the chorus of Jewish women” (Parente 1987, 119). Thus, the ‘tragedy’ in Grotius’s drama is less the death of Christ than man’s inability to understand its salutary significance (cf. *ibid.*).

Another important aspect of the Greek play is that it is a cento-like composition of quotations from Euripides, establishing a critical dialogue between the pagan and the Christian sense of the words (cf. Parente 1985, 367). Grotius, in turn, modeled his play mainly on verses from Seneca, and thus also contributed to the development of Neo-Latin tragic diction. The prologue’s first lines, for example, are a variation on *Hercules furens* (1–5), while Jesus as character recalls *Hercules Oetaeus*: He appears as a Stoic hero who consents to his ‘fate’

26 Cf. Meter 1984; Harst 2012a, 358–367.

27 Heinsius wrote two Neo-Latin tragedies, *Auriacus sive libertas saucia* (1602) and *Herodes infanticida* (1611, printed 1632), which are both modeled on Seneca (cf. Becker-Cantarino 1978, 133–142; Bloemendal 2007). The latter was adapted to German by Johann Klaj as *Herodes der Kindermörder* (1645).

28 J.C. Scaliger’s *Poetices libri* were propagated by his son, Joseph Scaliger, who was an influential professor at Leiden; in Germany, Opitz promulgated Scaliger’s definition of tragedy by including it in his pamphlet *Buch von der deutschen Poeterey* (1624, c. 5).

29 For an overview over Grotius’s dramatic works—besides *Christus patiens* he wrote *Adamus exul* and *Sophompaneas*—see Gellinek 1983, 6–24.

and dies willingly (96–106; cf. Gellinek 1983, 19), while his declamatory diction sometimes tends to be involuntarily comic (e.g. when he praises the miracles he performed by saying that even Death complained of the decreasing number of bodies in his power, 67–70). Similarly, both Peter and Judas condemn their betrayal of Jesus in words full of Senecan pathos (compare, for example, 552ff. with *Phaedra* 671ff.). This “intended parallelism between pagan pathos and Christian martyrdom” (Gellinek 1983, 19), however, transforms the idea of the Passion significantly: While early Christianity emphasized God’s suffering and humiliation as human being, baroque theater highlights his Stoic impassibility as a divine hero. This important inversion governs baroque martyr plays in general, in which torture and death are represented as steps that will unfailingly lead to heaven and therefore lose their corporeal seriousness.

In other respects, however, Grotius—in line with his friend Heinsius’s criticism of Seneca’s declamatory style³⁰—tempered his diction; e.g., he doesn’t employ as many antithetical tropes, which may render speech more brilliant, but can also appear as pompous and artificial. A similar moderation, rare in baroque religious drama, can be found on the level of content: In the penultimate scene, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus discuss who is to blame for the crucifixion; while Joseph calls for divine punishment of Romans and Jews alike (1190–1218), Nicodemus declares that also Jesus’s followers are responsible, since they didn’t intervene to help him (1219–1239; cf. 1380–1383). Thus, Grotius undermines the strict opposition between Christians and infidels that structures baroque religious drama in general.³¹ Altogether, however, *Christus patiens* shares its theatrical character with Senecan drama, beginning with the declamatory prologue and the static, unconnected scenes and reaching to the meta-theatrical structure of the play’s last scene: Here, Mary—as part of the audience on stage—mourns the death of her son, while being accompanied by John; he reminds her to moderate her grief and to remember her exceptional status as mother of God, opening her eyes to see Christ in his glory. Thus, the tragedy also addresses its mode of reception: The contemplation of human misery should finally turn into a spiritual vision of glory.³²

30 Cf. *De tragoediae constitutione*, 194–198, with reference to *Hercules Oetaeus*. Also in his chapter on tragic diction, Heinsius declares that Seneca’s Latin as compared to the Augustean age is deteriorated (ibid., c. 17, esp. p. 203); a judgment that Vossius will reiterate in his *Poeticarum institutionum libri tres* (1647), l. 2, c. 14, §19–22.

31 Significantly enough, Klaj’s adaptation (*Der leidende Christus*, 1645) deletes the lines in question.

32 Grotius’s rhetorical exercise became quite famous, as several reprints and adaptations indicate (J. Klaj adapted the play in 1645 and D.W. Triller published an annotated

Beyond these two examples for the direct influence of Seneca in German and Dutch rhetoric and poetics, Seneca has been imitated on various levels. Besides the general structure of his plays, more concerned with the display of affects than with the development of an action, other characteristics like the protagonist's self-exhortation to violent passion, the predilection for the macabre and spectacular, as well as the frequent appearance of ghosts are common traits of baroque theater, especially in the Dutch writers Pieter Corneliszoon Hooft, Coster and Vos (Asmuth 1978, 250–265), as well as in the German poets Gryphius and Lohenstein (Plard 1964; Lefèbvre 1964). Furthermore, the notion that what is being represented also is watched by a divine audience—common to Seneca's philosophy and theater, and already quoted in *Christus patiens*—is frequently employed on the baroque stage (e.g. Gryphius, *Carolus Stuardus* 1,321–324; *Papinian* 2,305–310), as well as other meta-theatrical references (represented events are referred to as “mourning play” [“Trauerspiel”], the scene is often called a “stage” [“Schauplatz”]).

Also on a rhetorical level, many passages of Seneca's tragedies were considered as rhetorical archetypes: e.g., the depiction of Medea's black mass is recalled in Gryphius (*Leo Arminius*, *Cardenio* and *Celine*) and Lohenstein (*Agrippina*); Phaedra's seductive speech to Hippolytus becomes the paradigm for Lohenstein's depiction of the temptress Agrippina; the macabre sacrifice from *Oedipus* is restaged in Bidermann's *Philemon Martyr*; and the image of the troubled cosmos from *Thyestes* (784–788) is echoed again in Gryphius (*Carolus Stuardus*, 3,801–808). In all of these instances, of course, Seneca is quoted in a Christian context, and citations from the lips of his dying heroes are especially common; the description of Polyxena, for example, whose beauty in death is compared to the setting sun (1137–1142), is transmitted throughout the centuries in Neo-Latin, Dutch and German tragedy.³³ The triumphant conversion of Stoicism to Christianity is nowhere more palpable than in Nicolas Caussin's *Felicitas* (1621), a play that stages the cruel martyrdom of Felicitas's seven sons in her presence: the scene in which Felicitas collects her sons' dismembered bodies recalls *Phaedra*, where Theseus gathers his son's disfigured body (1246–1274). While Theseus, however, can't recognize his son's face, since it lost

bilingual edition in 1723); its exemplary status as Christian tragedy (as well as its dependence on Seneca) was confirmed when F. Rappolt published it in his *Poetica Aristotelica* (1678) together with *Trojan Women* as an archetype to be imitated—even if he claims that both plays are strictly constructed after Aristotle.

33 Namely in Buchanan's *Jepthes* (1544; v. 1396–1399, discussed in Heinsius, *De tragoediae constitutione liber*, 1643, c. 16); Vondel's *Maria Stuart* (1646; v. 1852f.; 1686–1689) and Gryphius's *Catharina von Georgien* (1657; 5,36–38).

its star-like splendor, its “spirited gaze” forever (*haecne illa facies igne sidereo nitens,/ animosa flectens lumina?* 1269), Felicitas knows that the beauty of her sons will be restored in heaven: “*O digna ceruix syderibus, o syderum/ Radiata flammis lumina ergo vos sopor/ Vrget beatus, molliter decumbite/ Vos Christus olim lumine afflabit noue*” (“O neck that is worthy of the stars, o eyes shining with the light of stars, now that the blessed sleep urges you, you will lie down softly, but Christ will breathe new light to you,” 249). In this and other Jesuit martyr plays, torture loses all its terrifying reality, to the extent that it is often called a “play” (*ludus*); thus, the triumphant Christianization of tragic Stoicism also threatens to lead baroque religiosity to theatrical irreality.

4 Tragic Seneca in the Baroque Mourning-Play

Grotius’s Seneca-imitation *Christus patiens* can be considered a model for religious drama both in the Netherlands and in Germany. The most famous Dutch poet of the time, Joost van den Vondel, was friends with Grotius and translated two of his Neo-Latin tragedies, while some of his own dramas reflect his engagement with Grotius’s representation of the passion (cf. Parente 1987, 110–131; see also Asmuth 1978, 265–269). Especially the early Biblical plays such as *Maeghden* (1639) and *Gebroeders* (1640) are constructed in the fashion of *Trojan Women* (which Vondel translated in 1626), in that they are centered upon a sacrificial death and its extensive mourning; the latter was adapted by the important German poet Gryphius, who added to his otherwise scrupulously faithful translation a prologue and an epilogue, spoken by the ghost of Saul, thus underscoring the Senecan design of the play (Plard 1964, 249–251). In his own plays, Gryphius treats historical events rather than biblical stories, representing history as an untiring repetition of Jesus’s sacrificial death (Harst 2012); but also here, he remains faithful to Vondel’s clear-cut antagonism between persecutor and innocent. Furthermore, his stagework and rhetoric betray a close affinity with Seneca,³⁴ while ‘enriching’ tragic Stoicism with Christian transcendence.³⁵ Gryphius’s follower and rival Lohenstein, in contrast, employs Senecan doctrine and theatricality in a more ambivalent manner: Lohenstein’s history plays, while certainly more bloodthirsty than Gryphius’s, mostly lack the transcendental framework of divine providence,

34 Cf. Plard 1964, 251–256; Stachel 1907, 248–273; Fischer & Uerpmann 1991.

35 Plard 1964, 257–260; Schings 1966.

even if he still quotes the *topos* of world-theater in the dedicatory letter to his *Ibrahim Sultan*.³⁶

Besides these diverse aspects of Senecan influence and imitation, there are also baroque plays that use allusions to Seneca in order to reflect upon their relationship to Stoicism and ancient tragedy. In this context, three plays—Gryphius's *Papinian* (1659), Lohenstein's *Epicharis* (1665) and Bidermann's *Cenodoxus* (1602/1666)—merit a more detailed presentation. Gryphius's 'mourning-play' stages the story of Aemilius Papinianus, a Roman lawyer and counselor to the Caesars Geta and Bassian; when the latter kills his stepbrother and asks Papinian to defend his deed, he refuses, and accepts martyrdom rather than betray his inner sense of justice. In this sense, Papinian played an important role in contemporary discussions about the legitimacy of resistance to the emperor, and many of the play's dialogues stage contemporary political doctrine (Kühlmann 1982). More generally, Lipsius referred to Papinian as an example of Stoic constancy (*De Constantia* 2.8), while the drama itself highlights the analogy between Papinian, Seneca, and Socrates (5.83). However, it also insists upon the difference that Seneca *did* write an apology for Nero's murder of his mother (3.461–466). Furthermore, the play's meta-theatrical framework insists upon the Christian significance of Papinian's sacrifice: At the end of the second act, Themis, the allegory of justice, appears and declares that the following "*Trauerspiel*" only serves to exalt his righteousness—and to punish the emperor who will be tortured by his bad conscience; however, there are many indications that "justice" has a Christian meaning in this play, and even Papinian unwittingly quotes from the Bible when he refers to the divine law that is 'written in the soul' ("*der Seelen eingeschrieben*," 4.336–340).³⁷ Thus, in a double movement that seems to continue Benjamin's reflection on the death of Socrates (see above, §1), the play stages Papinian's sacrifice as an outdoing of Seneca's suicide and reframes it as a Christian martyr-play—which is thus two steps removed from its Greek archetype.³⁸

If, however, Papinian's death outdoes Seneca's (which outdid Socrates's), the play becomes entangled in the problem of repetitive history.³⁹ In fact, it explicitly states that the diarchy of Geta and Bassian repeats the mythical founding of Rome by Romulus and Remus, just as Geta's murder repeats Remus's

36 For an informative comparison between Gryphius and Lohenstein, see Schings 1980.

37 Cf. Rom 2:15; Harst 2010.

38 Gryphius's play was soon adapted for the traveling theater, but also inspired J.C. Hallmann (*Die Göttliche Rache/ Oder der Verführte Theodoricus Veronensis*, 1666/1684) and the Jesuit Franz Neumayr (*Papinianus Juris-Consultus*, 1733/1760).

39 Like many Senecan tragedies: see Boyle 1997, 34–36.

death; furthermore, the fratricide also repeats Nero's killing of his brother Britannicus, an analogy that furthermore foreshadows the incestuous union between Bassian and his stepmother Julia. Even the play's theme—Christian martyrdom—becomes compromised by repetition, since not only Papinian, but also the scheming Laetus dies as a Stoic, while Julia imitates the 'tragic' pathos of Stoic sentences in order to reach her political goals: "*ein unverzagt Gemüt steht wenn der Himmel fällt / Und steigt im Untergang / und trotz die grosse Welt*" ("an unshrinking mind will stand, even if the heavens fall, and rises in its downfall, and defies the whole world," 3.121–22). If in Gryphius's earlier martyr-plays, then, the readiness to die for one's faith serves to distinguish between earthly vanity and divine truth, the multiplication of martyrs in *Papinian* indicates a growing uneasiness about this distinction, and thus also puts the genre itself into question (Kaminski 1998, 73–81).

This problematic is taken up by Lohenstein, whose plays radically question Stoic notions such as constancy and their Christian interpretation.⁴⁰ In contrast to Vondel and Gryphius, Lohenstein's characters aren't grouped in binary oppositions, so that there are no innocent victims anymore; moreover, Lohenstein further multiplies the deaths on stage, many of which question the notion of martyrdom precisely by imitating it too ostentatiously. On the other hand, Lohenstein alludes both to Seneca's philosophical writings and tragedies even more frequently than Gryphius, but focuses more on political prudence than on (religious) constancy (Schings 1980, 58); also, his highly stylized language testifies to its Senecan heritage (Asmuth 1971, 48; Stachel 1907, 317–323), while many of his sentences have been collected in an anthology that presents him as the 'German Seneca' (Männling 1710). Two of his dramas even stage Seneca as a historical person: *Agrippina*, based on Tacitus and the (Pseudo-)Senecan *Octavia*, revolves around Nero's murder of his mother, and *Epicharis* stages the Pisonian conspiracy against Nero and the subsequent execution of the insurgents. Especially the latter play exhibits a long series of torture and death, since almost every conspirator, after declaring himself innocent and rejecting any collaboration in martyr-like fashion, gives in to bodily pain and reveals further insurgents. Even Seneca, who did not take part in the conspiracy, is engulfed in this avalanche of pseudo-martyrs, and the

40 While Lohenstein is mostly regarded as follower and rival of Gryphius, his plays and especially their lyrical aspects also show signs of influence from Nuremberg poets such as J. Klaj, who in turn adapted plays from the Leiden philologists Heinsius and Grotius (Stachel 1907, 283). For Seneca's influence on Lohenstein in general, see Liebermann 1978, 417–424 and Lefèbvre 1964.

play's final act stages his suicide between obedience and passive resistance.⁴¹ Here, Seneca is given opportunity to repeat his most important teachings, as many of Lohenstein's lines quote directly from Seneca, and thus to revive his *imago vitae* (5.249); he even compares himself explicitly to Socrates, calling the cup of hemlock a "*Götter-Tranck*" ("potion of the Gods") that he shares with the Greek philosopher (5.410–415). If Seneca, however, seems to figure here as one of the last representatives of true martyrdom, the text questions this role by way of intertextual relations: Alluding frequently to *Agrippina*, the play in which Seneca wrote an apology for Nero's murder of his mother, *Epicharis* underlines the discrepancy between Seneca's ethic stance and his earlier political opportunism, thus unmasking the Stoic posture as mere appearance (Arend 2003, 316). While in Gryphius's plays before *Papinian*, the staging of the Stoic Christian's martyrdom serves to distinguish radically between authenticity and imitation, in Lohenstein the archetype of the martyr play—Seneca '*tragicus*'—is itself denounced as mere 'theater,' thus also questioning the genre as a whole.

The inherent theatricality of Stoicism, in fact, provides the main conflict for Bidermann's "Comico-Tragoedia" *Cenodoxus*. Bidermann, who in earlier years read Lipsius enthusiastically but later took his distance with Delrio,⁴² depicts in his protagonist a Parisian doctor, famous for both his learning and piety; however, as the allegorical characters 'Hypocrisis' and 'Philautia' ("Hypocrisy" and "Self-love") make clear, his piety is dependent upon his audience: "Probum | Turba facit; ubi abit arbiter, virtus abit" ("the gaze of the multitude made him honest; where the judge leaves, virtue leaves, too", 2.2). In a way, *Cenodoxus* plays theater, but even he himself can't distinguish anymore between authenticity and appearance, as the voices of 'Hypocrisy' and 'Self-love' continue to confirm his virtuousness. Nothing, not even the demonstration of hell's eternal pains, can terrify him enough to make him conscious of his sinful acting; finally, he is struck with sickness as a divine punishment, but even on his deathbed he continues to simulate piety: He accepts his death, he says, as the divine will and an opportunity to show Stoic constancy: "*Pulchrum est DEO spectaculum / Hominem videre, cum doloribus & nece | compositum*" ("it is a beautiful spectacle for God to see a man fight with pain and death," 4.3). The sentence, like many of this scene, alludes to Seneca (*De providentia* 2.8), if only to pervert its meaning: the "spectacle" that *Cenodoxus* stages underlines the Stoic's

41 As Lohenstein himself notes, his staging of Seneca's death refers to Tacitus's account (which he read in an edition by Lipsius), but also dramatizes the engraving from Lipsius's Seneca-edition (see above, §2; Hess 1981, 204).

42 See section 2 above; Mayer 1994, 166.

problematic dependence on a (human or divine) audience, that necessarily compromises his alleged self-sufficiency (see above, §1). If theatricality served as an argument for Stoic constancy in Seneca, in Bidermann it becomes the epitome of hypocrisy.

This is all the more remarkable, since Bidermann's play also employs the notion of world-theater in a positive sense: Unwittingly, Cenodoxus is a marionette in the eternal fight between good and evil spirits; if the evil forces finally win his soul, it is only because God already gave his consent to use him as a deterrent example. The conflict between these two notions of theatricality—the one leading to sin and condemnation, the other proving divine providence—remains unresolved in Bidermann, even if it may be explained with reference to predestination; while he explores new paths in terms of language and form (*Cenodoxus* is labeled *Comico-Tragoedia*), it is this ambivalence that testifies most clearly to his Senecan heritage.

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Early ‘English Seneca’: From ‘Coterie’ Translations to the Popular Stage

Jessica Winston

In act 3, scene 13 of Thomas Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy* (ca. 1585–1588), the wronged father, Hieronimo, considers revenging the murder of his son. He first thinks to leave justice to God, citing Romans 12:19, where God reserves vengeance to himself (*vindicta mihi*). Yet he quickly decides to seek retribution on his own, turning for support to lines from Seneca’s tragedies, a copy of which he carries with him.¹ Other revengers in Renaissance drama look explicitly to Seneca for guidance. Antonio, in John Marston’s *Antonio’s Revenge* (ca. 1599–1600), appears on stage holding Seneca’s works, citing *sententiae* to support his points.² Still others echo Seneca in distant, but recognizable ways. Shakespeare’s Hamlet criticizes his failure to revenge his father’s murder: “Why, what an ass am I?” He complains:

Ay, sure, this is most brave,
That I, the son of the dear murderèd,
Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,
Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words
And fall a-cursing like a very drab [i.e. a prostitute],
A scullion! (*Hamlet* 2.2.560–65)

The lines are patterned on a similar moment of self-reproach in Seneca’s *Thyestes*. There, Atreus criticizes himself for his delay in revenging himself

¹ On the dating of this play, see J.R. Mulryne 2009, xix–xxiv.

² The book appears to be Seneca’s prose or an imaginary collection of Seneca’s prose and tragedy. At 2.2.47–49 (Mulryne 2009), Antonio, reading directly from it, cites Seneca’s *De providentia* (6.6), suggesting that this is a book of prose. However, in an earlier in the scene (at 4–6), he paraphrases Seneca’s *Medea* (155–56) in English, suggesting either that he is simply familiar enough with Seneca’s plays to paraphrase from memory, or that in both instances, he refers to the book he carries, which is implied to be a compilation of Seneca’s works comprising both prose and plays. On the tradition of the ‘two Senecas,’ especially in sixteenth-century England, see James Ker and Jessica Winston 2012, 7–10.

on his brother: *ignave, iners, enervis et . . . inulte* ("Idle, inert, impotent, and . . . unavenged!" 176–78).³ He then, like Hamlet later, censures himself for spending time on words instead of deeds (178–80):

post tot scelera, post fratris dolos
fasque omne ruptum questibus vanis agis
iratus Atreus?⁴

All three of these moments call attention to the importance of Senecan tragedy for playwrights in later sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England. During this period, dramatists like Kyd, Marston, Shakespeare, and Christopher Marlowe borrowed and paraphrased lines from the tragedies; they modelled speeches on the bombastic rhetoric of Seneca's characters; they patterned conversations after the quick sparring of Senecan dialogue; and they adapted the ghosts of Seneca's plays. Indeed, Seneca's styles, sayings, and scenes appeared so often on the later sixteenth-century stage that in 1589 Thomas Nashe famously mocked the trend. Contemporary playwrights, in his view, copied the "good sentences" and "tragical speeches" out of the tragedies. Possibly alluding to Seneca's suicide by wrist cutting, Nashe grumbled that English dramatists were killing Seneca, "let[ting] blood" from Seneca and draining his words "line by line and page by page," until he "at length" came to "die to our stage" (R.B. McKerrow 1966, 3:315–16).⁵

There is little evidence that Renaissance playwrights copied English Seneca extensively, but Nashe's comment is important: he refers not to Seneca, but to 'English Seneca,' vernacular translations of the tragedies, which first appeared in England in the 1560s and were collected and published together in 1581. Nashe thus highlights the prominent role that the first English translations of the tragedies played in popularizing Seneca for the Renaissance public stage. In the 1560s, through a series of original translations and adaptations of Seneca, translators and playwrights drew new attention to the Roman

3 Latin quotations and translations from Seneca's tragedies follow Fitch 2004.

4 "After so many crimes, after your brother's treachery and the breaking of every principle, do you act with futile complaints—you, Atreus in anger?"

A.B. Taylor 1998 suggests that earlier lines from the speech of Hamlet quoted above, specifically Hamlet's reference to himself as a "peasant slave" (2.2.527) may be influenced by a similar moment in Studley's translation of *Hercules Oetaeus*, in which Hercules rebukes Philoctetes's cowardice and failure to act decisively, calling him a "coward, peasant slave" (522–24).

5 Here and throughout, I have modernized and regularized the spelling and punctuation in quotations from sources using early modern spelling.

tragedies in England. They demonstrated that the tragedies were valuable and relevant to their own time and for many reasons. The tragedies were written in a laudable style and filled with memorable, wise sayings; they were compatible with a Renaissance Christian framework; and they offered a model of political drama that could address contemporary issues of monarchic resistance, princely counsel, the succession to the English throne, and even England's imperial ambitions. Later playwrights, such as Kyd, Marston, and Shakespeare, were inspired directly and indirectly by these early English models, composing tragedies for the public stage that drew upon Senecan styles and motifs to address political and other issues of their moment as well.

1 Traditions of Transmission and Translation

Throughout Western Europe in the sixteenth century, Seneca was the principal model for classical tragedy. By the middle of the century, when the first published versions of Seneca appeared in England, there were already on the Continent established traditions of editing, publishing, and translating his plays. As early as the 1480s in Italy, published versions circulated in collected and single-play printed editions, and newer editions appeared consistently through the century in Venice, Paris, and Basel, among other cities.⁶ For the first English translations and adaptations, three early editions were especially important: Jodocus Badius Ascensius's edition and commentary (Paris, 1514), which the first English translator of Seneca, Jasper Heywood, may have consulted as a source; the Aldine Press's edition by Hieronymus Avantius (Venice, 1517), and Sebastian Gryphius's edition (Lyons, 1541), which was most certainly Heywood's main source, as well as perhaps for another translator, John Studley.⁷ Latin publications existed alongside an established tradition of vernacular translation. This practice dates back to at least the very beginning of the fifteenth century, when A. de Vilaragut translated four of the plays into Spanish. The complete plays were translated into Italian in 1497, and then into French in 1534. Translations of individual plays also appeared in print, beginning with *Agamemnon* in French in 1557 and 1561, and continuing through the sixteenth century.⁸

Despite these established traditions, an English engagement with Seneca did not begin until the 1560s. Prior to this decade, Seneca attracted almost no

6 John Hazel Smith 1967, 49–74.

7 On the translators' Latin sources, see Ker and Winston 2012, 279–80.

8 R.R. Bolgar 1954, 534–37.

attention in England, with only some philosophical works, spuriously attributed to Seneca, and excerpts of the drama circulating in manuscript and print.⁹ It is not surprising that England lagged behind the Continent in Senecan translations, since in the Renaissance, England tended to inherit, rather than lead, broader Continental cultural movements in religion, education, and literature. A more specific reason for the lack of early interest in Senecan tragedy is that, with the possible exception of *sententiae* drawn from the tragedies, the plays did not have a regular place in Latin language teaching in schools or at the universities.¹⁰ While Jesuit colleges and universities on the continent used Seneca's plays as dramatic models, schools in England did not develop a similar system.¹¹

In 1559, a fellow of All Souls College, Oxford, Jasper Heywood, translated *Troas*, setting off an immediate fashion for Senecan translation and adaptation. By the end of the decade, nine of the ten tragedies then attributed to Seneca had been translated into English:

1559	Jasper Heywood	<i>Troas</i> (also known as <i>Troades</i>)
1560	' '	<i>Thyestes</i>
1561	' '	<i>Hercules Furens</i> (also known as <i>Hercules</i>)
1563	Alexander Neville	<i>Oedipus</i>
1566	John Studley	<i>Agamemnon</i>
1566	' '	<i>Medea</i>
1566?	' '	<i>Hercules Oetaeus</i>
1567	' '	<i>Hippolytus</i> (also known as <i>Phaedra</i>)
ca. 1566	Thomas Nuce	<i>Octavia</i>

In addition to these translations, playwrights also adapted Seneca. Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton's *Gorboduc* (1562) incorporates characteristically Senecan forms, including lengthy speeches, quick verbal exchanges, and

9 These philosophical works include Robert Whittington's translation of *De Remediis Fortuitorum* (1547), as well as editions and translations of two works by St. Martin of Braga (515–ca. 579), which were erroneously attributed to Seneca in the period: *The Rule of an Honest Life* (1516, 1523, 1538, and 1546) and *The Mirror of Glass of Manners and Wisdom* (1547). Wyatt translated the last stanza of the second chorus of *Thyestes* as "Stand Whoso List upon the Slipper Top."

10 T.W. Baldwin 1944, 2: 553–60.

11 See Roland Mayer 1994, 159 and 166, and N.H. Griffin 1985. Only one potential record of a school play prior to 1560 based on Seneca exists: Dean Nowell's copy of a preface to *Hippolytus* in his notebook, which may have been played at Westminster in the Christmas of 1546. On Hippolytus, see Baldwin 1944, 2: 560.

choral odes between the acts. A later play, the multi-authored *Gismond of Salerne* (ca. 1566), contains scenes patterned after Seneca, most notably a description of a tower modelled on the dungeon bower where Atreus slaughters Thyestes's children in *Thyestes*.¹²

The translations share many features, so much so that they have been viewed as a concerted "project."¹³ This perspective makes some sense. The translations appeared in quick succession, and they are stylistically similar: the fourteener is the primary meter in eight of the nine translations, and all of the translators have heavily alliterated lines.¹⁴ Also, each one is dedicated to the highest ranking members of the government, Queen Elizabeth or members of her close cabinet of advisors, the Privy Council.¹⁵ The translators are similar as well. All four were relatively young when they composed their translations: Jasper Heywood (1535–1598) published his first translation at twenty-four; Alexander Neville (1544–1614) was sixteen;¹⁶ John Studley (ca. 1545–1590?) was twenty-one, and Thomas Nuce (ca. 1545–1617) about twenty-one, too. They were university-educated, and had connections to the most important literary network of the day, which had roots in the English legal societies, the Inns of Court (discussed further below).¹⁷ In addition, all four had strong, if contrasting,

12 Curtis Perry 2014, 279–93, esp. 286–87.

13 O.B. Hardison 1989, 148–53.

14 In terms of verse, Nuce's *Octavia* is the exception, which is primarily in pentameter couplets, with some scenes in tetrameter quatrains.

15 Heywood dedicates *Troas* to Queen Elizabeth, *Thyestes* to John Mason, an ambassador and privy councillor, and *Hercules furens* to William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, a Tudor diplomat. Neville dedicates *Oedipus* to Nicholas Wotton. Studley dedicates *Agamemnon* to William Cecil, first Baron Burghley, and *Medea* to Francis Russell, second Earl of Bedford; Nuce dedicates *Octavia* to Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester.

16 Although he published the work in 1563, when he was nineteen, Neville states that he produced the work when he was sixteen, i.e. in 1560, in his dedication "To the Right Honorable Master Doctor Wotton," published with his revised edition of *Oedipus*, which appeared in Newton's *Tenne Tragedies* in 1581 (sig. L5^v).

17 Heywood earned a BA from Oxford in 1553 and an MA in 1558. He was elected a fellow of Merton College, but in 1558 due to conflicts with the warden, he had to resign his fellowship, at which point he was elected to a fellowship at All Souls College, where he wrote all three of his translations. The title pages to *Troas* and *Hercules furens* identify him as a student in Oxford, while the title page to *Thyestes* identifies him as a fellow of All Souls College, Oxford. Neville was admitted to St. John's College, Cambridge, and matriculated on 10 November 1559, although there is no evidence that he resided there. Studley attended Westminster School and was then elected to Trinity College, Cambridge. He graduated BA in 1566, becoming a minor fellow on 8 September 1567. The title pages to *Agamemnon* and *Medea* identify him as a student in Trinity College, Cambridge. Nuce

religious convictions. Heywood was a devout Catholic: his granduncle was the Catholic martyr Thomas More, and in 1561, following his brother, Ellis, he left England to become a Jesuit priest. Neville, on the other hand, was a staunch Protestant, and would go on to be secretary to Matthew Parker, archbishop of Canterbury, and to his successors, Edmund Grindal and John Whitgift. John Studley was a zealous Puritan, who openly opposed John Whitgift, the future Archbishop for whom Neville would work. Whitgift had supported new Cambridge University regulations against Puritans, and Studley's opposition forced him to vacate his fellowship on charges of nonconformity. Although a friend of Studley's, Nuce appears to have been a more moderate Protestant: After Cambridge, he obtained a living as the rector of Cley, Norfolk, the first of many livings he held in the church.

In addition to these similarities, in 1581, Thomas Newton gathered the translations into *Seneca: His Tenne Tragedies*, including his own translation of the remaining tragedy, *Thebais* (also known as *Phoenissae*). The collection invites readers further to see the works as a set, as many contemporaries regarding the tragedies did. In 1570, one T. Smith referred obliquely to the translations when he griped that "everyman endeavoureth to get a crown of fame, / By setting forth fine tragedies for to augment their name."¹⁸ In 1586, William Webb referred to "the laudable authors of Seneca and English."¹⁹ In 1598, Francis Meres praised several "versifiers for their learned translations," including "the translators of Seneca's tragedies."²⁰ Yet as much as the translations seem like a 'project,' this idea must be qualified, since the works were not jointly conceived or executed. Instead, they reflect the shared tastes, contexts, and concerns of the translators, who moved in intersecting academic and social networks.

2 Seneca in the Literary Culture of the Mid-Sixteenth-Century

What accounts for the sudden and sustained popularity of Seneca in the 1560s? The answer to this question is complex, and lies in several related

was graduated BA from Peterhouse, Cambridge, in 1562, and was then elected fellow of Pembroke College (MA, 1565; senior treasurer, 1568). The title page to *Octavia* identifies him as a student in Cambridge. Their connections to the Inns of Court are discussed further below. Unless otherwise specified, all biographical details about the translators come from Lawrence Goldman 2004.

¹⁸ John Drout 1570, sig. A4^r.

¹⁹ William Webbe 1586, sig. C4^r.

²⁰ Francis Meres 1598, fol. 285^v.

dynamics: the contemporary literary culture, the tastes of many writers and readers of the time for classical translation, and the contemporary political relevance of Seneca's drama.

The most influential of these dynamics is the contemporary literary culture. In the 1560s, the largest and most significant literary and social network revolved around the residential legal societies in London, called the Inns of Court. The Inns began sometime in the fourteenth century in order to provide legal training in the English common law to the sons of aristocrats and the gentry. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Inns also functioned as 'finishing schools,' where families sent their sons to gain useful legal knowledge and to acquire the social connections and urban polish that would help them to advance at court or in other exclusive social circles. Moreover, because the Inns were home to men who found the social and literary world of London more enticing and relevant to their future interests than the rigorous study of the law, the early modern Inns of Court were also important centers for intellectual and literary activity. Throughout the period, many of the most well-known poets and dramatists belonged to an inn of court, and early modernists widely agree that the Inns energized and shaped English literary and dramatic activities throughout the Renaissance.²¹ Yet the literary culture of the Inns was especially vibrant in the 1560s, when a significant number of men involved in the associational life of the societies were also published authors, including nearly all of the major or minor writers of the day, such as Sackville and Norton (both admitted to the Inner Temple, 1555), the authors of *Gorboduc*; Thomas North (adm. Lincoln's Inn 1555), the translator of Plutarch's *Lives* (1579); Barnabe Googe (adm. Staple Inn 1560), a prolific and celebrated poet as well as the translator of the Neo-Latin *Zodiacus Vitae* (trans. 1560–1565); and the poet and dramatist George Gascoigne (adm. Gray's Inn 1555). In his "Preface" to *Thyestes*, Jasper Heywood called the Inns places where "Minerva's men and finest wits do swarm" (Ker and Winston 2012, ll. 83–84).

The translators of Seneca had social and familial connections that linked them with this important literary network. Heywood's uncle, the lawyer William Rastell, was a member of Gray's Inn, and Heywood joined the Inn briefly in 1561, residing with him.²² Moreover, Heywood's "Preface" to *Thyestes* closely parallels a poem by another contemporary member of the Inns, Barnabe Googe's "Preface" to the *Zodiac of Life* (1560 edition).²³ Alexander Neville became a

21 For a classic introduction to the literary culture of the Inns of Court, see Philip J. Finkelpearl 1969, esp. 3–31.

22 On Heywood's move to the Inns, see Ker and Winston 2012, 16–17.

23 On the parallels between these two "Prefaces," see *ibid.*, 38–39.

member of Gray's Inn in the early 1560s, and exchanged poetry with his uncle, Barnabe Googe, and another member-poet, George Gascoigne.²⁴ John Studley produced his translations at Cambridge, but later came to the Inns of Court, and the commendatory verses in *Agamemnon* highlight his connections with writers affiliated with the legal societies. Thomas Nuce translated *Octavia* while at Cambridge, and although not a member of the Inns, he wrote two commendatory poems for *Agamemnon*.²⁵

In the 1560s, the most popular type of literary and intellectual production among the men at the Inns was translation, especially classical translations. Writers associated with the Inns composed numerous vernacular translations, including versions of Virgil's *Aeneid* (1558, 1562, 1573), Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (1565, 1567), Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations* (1561), the *Manual of Epictetus* (1567), Pliny's *Summary of Natural History* (1566), Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus* (books 1–6, 1552; books seven and eight, 1567), Caesar's *Gallie Wars* (1564), and Euclid's *Geometry* (1570). One critic describes the Inns as the center of a "translation movement."²⁶ The translations cover a wide range of topics and genres—epic, drama, lyric poetry, moral philosophy, military history, exemplary lives—but they are united as a group by the dominance of ancient Roman works, as well as by the seriousness and importance of their subject matter. These translations are characterized by *gravitas*: they take up weighty subjects of imperial history, ancient mythology, morality, propriety, and politics. Warren Boutcher characterizes the topics and tone of the translations of this period in terms of "confinement" (2000, 52):

confinement in source material to classical poetry, classical history, stoic philosophy and modern court humanism [...]; confinement, in ethical terms, to the commonweal ethos of the 'independent' stoic and the 'honest' courtier, to Erasmian piety and a political morality offering [...] lessons applicable to contemporary affairs [...].

In other words, the translators of the period had a taste for 'improving' works, ones that could inculcate virtue, develop style, and provide the historical and foundational knowledge that future landowners and statesmen would need to perform their public roles.

²⁴ On these poetic exchanges, see Jessica Winston 2011, 223–24.

²⁵ For specific details on the translators' connections with the Inns, see Winston 2006, 29–58 (esp. 32–34).

²⁶ See C.H. Conley 1927, esp. 18–33.

Seneca's tragedies appealed to these contemporary tastes. In their prefaces, the translators often describe the tragedies as serious, improving works, exemplary models of style, and resources for moral guidance. In *Troas*, Heywood calls Seneca "the flower of all writers" and "so excellent a writer" (Ker and Winston 2012, 71), and in the "Preface" to *Thyestes*, he praises Seneca's "wondrous wit and regal style" (Ker and Winston 2012, p. 141, l. 36). John Studley calls Seneca a "peerless poet,"²⁷ and Thomas Newton refers to the author's "peerless sublimity and loftiness of style."²⁸ For the translators, this "peerless" style teaches virtue. Alexander Neville tells readers to mind "what is meant by the whole course of the history [i.e. the tragedy], and frame thy life free from such mischiefs, wherewith the world at this present is universally overwhelmed." He further asserts that the tragedy teaches readers "to beware of sin, the end whereof is shameful and miserable."²⁹ Likewise, W. Parker writes in Studley's *Agamemnon*: "This tragedy of worthy Seneca, / Whose saws profound (whoso thereon do look) / To virtue's race do show a ready way" (Ker and Winston 2012, p. 215, ll. 22–24).

Seneca was the most commonly translated author of the period, more so than even Cicero or Ovid. The popularity of Seneca's tragedies, in particular, went beyond contemporary literary tastes to the political relevance of his works, both in his own day and in Renaissance England. Seneca was a tutor and counsellor to the Roman emperor, Nero, and his tragedies dealt obliquely with the politics of his time. The tragedies, in the words of J.P. Sullivan (1985, 157),

confront the nature of kingship and tyranny, along with such themes as regal clemency; the adaptability and insecurity of courtiers; the dangers of public life; the inevitable corruption, instability, and evanescence of power; the treachery that surrounds it; the resentment bred by arbitrary rule; and the constant possibility of assassination.

One example is *Thyestes*, a play that explores the psychology of the tyrant.³⁰ Atreus wants to revenge himself on his brother, but more than that, he desires to be all-powerful. In an early scene, he rejects the idea of constraints—based on religion, piety, honour—as mere conventions imposed on subjects, not kings: *Sanctitas pietas fides / privata bona sunt: qua iuvat reges eant* ("Righteousness, goodness, loyalty are private values: kings should go where they please,"

²⁷ Studley 1556, sig. A1^v.

²⁸ Newton 1581, sig. A3^v.

²⁹ Neville 1563, sigs. a5^r–a6^r.

³⁰ See Gottfried Mader 1988, 31–47.

217–18). Atreus, instead, aims to live how he wills, seeing himself as higher and greater than even the gods. At the beginning of act 5, having completed the butchery of his nephews, Atreus thus claims (885–88):

Aequalis astris gradior et cunctos super
altum superbo vertice attingens polum.
nunc decora regni teneo, nunc solium patris.
dimitto superos: summa votorum attigi.³¹

Combined with the tyrant's will to create his own rules is his need to make others obey them (Mader 1988, 37). For Atreus, obedience is not sufficient; he needs to see his victims not only give in to him, but to be forced to do so against their will. As Atreus states: *Maximum hoc regni bonum est, | quod facta domini cogitur populus sui | tam ferre quam laudare* ("This is the greatest value of kingship: that the people are compelled to praise as well as endure their master's actions," 205–7).

In the European Renaissance, as Gordon Braden has influentially argued, "Senecan tragedy [took] on urgent plausibility in the Renaissance encounter with the prospects and reality of absolutism" (1985, 107). But in England in the 1560s, especially among members of the Inns of Court, the tumultuous political situation raised this prospect in ways that made Seneca's tragedies especially relevant. In 1558, Queen Elizabeth I succeeded to the throne, and her ascendancy raised or amplified numerous issues about the power of the monarch and the rule of law. Elizabeth's accession was itself contested, since she was a woman and the daughter of Henry VIII by his second wife. Was Elizabeth the rightful heir? Moreover, with the new reign, England witnessed its third major religious reversal of the century, following Henry VIII's move to Protestantism in the 1530s, the return to Catholicism under Mary I (r. 1553–1558), and a return to Protestantism again under Elizabeth. Who had the right to establish the religion of England? Moreover, because Elizabeth was unmarried, her Privy Council, members of Parliament, and her people worried about the potential of foreign marriages to challenge England's sovereignty (since Elizabeth, as a woman, would be expected to be subordinate to her husband), or to alter its religious settlement, and these fears were amplified by related concerns over the succession: Elizabeth I had no heir, and a principal claimant to the

31 "Peer of the stars, I stride, out-topping all, my proud head reaching to the lofty sky. *Now* I hold the kingdom's glories, *now* my father's throne. I discharge the gods: I have reached the pinnacle of my prayers."

throne was a foreign, Catholic woman: Mary, Queen of Scots.³² Who would inherit after Elizabeth? Many sought to advise the queen on how to handle these issues, most notably members of her Privy Council and her Parliament. Elizabeth, as the monarch, was not required to listen to, let alone heed, anyone's counsel on these questions, although members of her Privy Council and Parliament made impassioned arguments to the contrary.³³

Members of the Inns of Court were especially interested in these issues. As H.B. Charlton comments, the writers connected with the Inns had the "natural bias of law students looking to the state services for their future," as well as their "general concern in a specific political problem which had as many personal as political aspects—the anxiety to provide Elizabeth with a husband and the kingdom with an undisputed successor" (1946, 163). For them, Seneca's tragedies spoke in compelling, albeit indirect ways to these contemporary problems.

Heywood's *Troas* brings out this oblique political relevance. The plot details the downfall of Queen Hecuba and other women of Troy in the aftermath of the Trojan War. The play opens with Hecuba as she laments the deaths of her husband King Priam and her son Hector and closes with her departure as a captive slave for Greece. The main action alternates between two stories: the sacrifice of Hecuba's daughter, Polyxena, and the capture and murder of Hecuba's grandson, Astyanax (son of Hector), who, the Greeks fear, could avenge the fall of Troy. Heywood's translation of this story is relatively free. He adds scenes and passages, and shapes even individual lines to emphasize themes already present, especially the instability of power. Heywood calls attention to his free approach in his "Preface to the Readers," stating that he adds a Chorus at the end of the act 1, a new scene with the ghost of Achilles in act 2, scene 1, and three stanzas to the Chorus at the end of act 2. At the end of act 3, he also substitutes a new Chorus for the existing one. Many of these "freely composed" passages borrow from other Senecan plays, including *Thyestes* and *Medea*.³⁴ These new additions emphasize the insubstantiality of power, as in the concluding lines of the first choral ode. Referring to Priam, the Chorus states: "Lo, learn by him, O kings, ye are but dust" (Ker and Winston 2012, l. 52). Other additions reiterate this point, such as a line added to act 2, scene 2 stating that Priam is "a cause of pride, a glass of fear, a mirror for the nones" (*ibid.*, l. 74). Heywood, a staunch Catholic, dedicated the play to Elizabeth 1, perhaps to

32 Mary was Henry VIII's grandniece, the eldest descendant and grandchild of Henry VIII's older sister, Margaret Tudor.

33 For a classic summary of these issues, see Mortimer Levine 1966.

34 Winston and Ker 2013, 564–75.

call attention to Elizabeth's own precarious position. If Hecuba is a mirror for Elizabeth, then the play possibly urges humility and mercy in England's new Queen by reminding her of her own reversals of fortune (Elizabeth was imprisoned in the earlier reign of Mary) and to admonish her that her new position will not necessarily insulate her from such reversals in the future.

In *Oedipus*, Neville also amplifies the political applicability of that play. Adapted from the same myth covered in Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex*, Seneca's play describes the Theban king's tragic discovery of his true identity and misdeeds. Like Heywood in *Troas*, Neville altered the play in significant ways, expanding the first chorus, omitting the second choral ode, and replacing the third and fourth choral odes. Also like Heywood's *Troas*, Neville's changes connect a Senecan theme, the capriciousness of fortune, directly with the idea that princely power, in particular, is fleeting. In Seneca's *Oedipus*, the original Chorus excuses Oedipus for his crimes, blaming instead a curse on his family (709–12):

Non tu tantis causa periclis,
non haec Labdacidas petunt
fata, sed veteres deum
irae sequuntur.³⁵

Neville's version emphasizes chance and the miserable life of princes (Neville, D2^r):

See, see the miserable estate of princes' careful life.
What raging storms, what bloody broils, what toil, what endless strife
Do they endure? O God, what plagues, what grief do they sustain?
A princely life: No, no, no doubt—an ever during pain.

Neville, like Heywood, amplifies Seneca's theme concerning the unpredictable fortunes of kings, yet he also changes the Chorus's point: Rather than being guiltless, Oedipus is culpable *because* he is a ruler: "grief" and "plagues" always attend rule. At the end of the chorus, he then introduces a clear moral: "Let Oedipus example be of this unto you all,/A mirror meet, a pattern plain of princes' careful thrall" (D2^v). Drawing on the "mirror" language that Heywood also employed, Oedipus is a "pattern" for princes. Notably, however, he also an example to "you all"—perhaps readers, but more likely Neville's

35 *You* are not the cause of these great hazards, not such is the fate that attacks the Labdacids: no, the ancient anger of the gods is pursuing us.

friends and associates, for whom Neville explicitly composed the work.³⁶ The play is a reminder to princes about their unstable positions, their “careful thrall.” It is also an invitation for the group of friends and peers associated with Neville, and by extension, the Inns of Court, to consider this aspect of kingship as well.

Two original inns-of-court plays also indicate that members of the Inns found in Seneca a form to address the politics of the day. The first is *Gorboduc*, written by Sackville and Norton, both members of the Inner Temple. The play was performed by members of the Inn in January, 1562, first at Inner Temple Hall and then, by invitation, before Queen Elizabeth at Whitehall. The plot of the play concerns an ancient British king who disastrously divides his realm between his sons, Ferrex and Porrex. The decision leads to a civil war, and the deaths of Gorboduc and his queen, as well as Ferrex and Porrex. The play adapts a number of literary traditions, including the dumb shows of medieval drama and descriptions of the falls of kings and nobles, typical in *de casibus* poetry. Senecan tragedy, however, inspires the five-act structure, the use of a chorus between acts, the long declamatory speeches, and the development of particular speeches. For instance, the opening speech of the play echoes the beginning of *Octavia*, and Gorboduc’s lines on the fate of the Trojans and their descendants recall Hecuba in *Troas*.³⁷ The play draws on these precedents and allusions to address the most pressing political debate of the day, the succession. The subject first comes up when Gorboduc divides the kingdom (1.2), and the play explicitly comments on the topic at the end when Gorboduc’s advisor, Eubulus, explains the best way to deal with succession: the monarch and parliament must cooperate to appoint a legitimate heir (5.2.264–71). For Sackville and Norton, Senecan tragedy helped to create a dramatic form in which to address contemporary politics.

A second play that exemplifies this trend is *The Misfortunes of Arthur* (1588). Written and performed by members of Gray’s Inn for Queen Elizabeth at Greenwich, the play deliberately hearkens back to *Gorboduc*. The plot concerns Mordred’s treachery and King Arthur’s death, and like *Gorboduc*, it has numerous sources and combines blank verse and medieval dumb shows. Yet *Misfortunes*, like *Gorboduc*, also blends legendary British history with Senecan style, and it contains numerous allusions to Seneca. It opens with the ghost of the Duke of Gorlois, whose speech closely follows that of the ghost of Tantalus in *Thyestes*. In addition, the play derives almost a third of its lines

36 In his “Preface,” Neville explains that he translated *Oedipus* “only to satisfy the instant request of a few my familiar friends” (Neville 1563, sig. A3^v).

37 P.J. Davis 2003, 89.

from Seneca.³⁸ As Philip Finkelpearl writes: "[O]n the surface what is noteworthy is [the play's] setting of Seneca's classical form and melodramatic material (adultery, incest, mutual slaughter of father and son, often directly translated from the Thyestes) in the romance world of King Arthur's Britain."³⁹ Moreover, as in *Gorboduc*, the men of Gray's Inn adapt Senecan form to advance a theme, the danger of empire, for imperial expansion leads to domestic degeneration.⁴⁰ As Mordred observes of his rebellion: "Since Arthur thus hath ransacked all abroad, / What marvel is't if Mordred rave at home?"⁴¹ In this play and elsewhere, Senecan tragedy is a template for the development of a native tradition of political tragedy in England.

3 Approaches to Translation and Adaptation

Even as the translations and adaptations offer political commentary, they are not political treatises. They are literary endeavours and attempts to wrestle the translation of Latin verse into English, and to makeover Roman literature for a new context. Each translator had his own style and approach to translation, and each one drew on contemporary terms and ideas to make the ancient Roman author speak to sixteenth-century audiences.

Jasper Heywood's translations are striking illustrations of the varied ways even a single author could approach translation. Each of his tragedies is different, and Heywood becomes increasingly less free, more literal, and more obscure over the course of his three works. As we have seen, his *Troas* is relatively free: Heywood invents, amplifies, substitutes passages and shapes lines in order to develop a central theme in the play concerning the evanescence of power. In literary terms, this translation is also ambitious, employing a number of metrical forms: fourteeners couplets, pentameter quatrains, and rhyme royal (a seven-line stanza rhymed ababbcc). This variety suggests that Heywood viewed this translation as his own literary creation, composed by way of translation. It is telling that his *Troas* can be read and appreciated as a free-standing adaptation, without necessarily referring back to the Latin.

38 The play also includes lines from Seneca's nephew Lucan's poem about civil war, *De bello civili* (i.e. *Pharsalia*). The following quote from Mordred is adapted from this poem. On Lucan in the play, see George M. Logan 1969, 22–32.

39 P.J. Finkelpearl, "Hughes, Sir Thomas (*fl.* 1571–1623)." In Goldman 2004.

40 For two discussions of the play's criticism of imperialism, see Curtis Perry 2011 and Derrick Spradlin 2005.

41 *Misfortunes* 1587, sig. C4^r.

Heywood's next two translations, however, become increasing literal, less innovative in terms of free composition and metrical variation, and less legible when separated from their source. In *Thyestes*, Heywood adds only one scene, a speech by Thyestes at the end of the play (act 5, scene 4), and he employs a less varied range of meters, putting all of the acts in fourteeners couplets and all of the choral odes in pentameter quatrains. Heywood also follows Seneca's verse units more closely, attempting to mirror more precisely the Latin's word order, syntax, and diction. For instance, in *Troas*, Heywood translated the opening six lines with eight lines in English; in *Thyestes*, he renders the opening six lines with six lines in English.⁴² Heywood's *Hercules furens* follows the source even more closely. It is a parallel translation written "for the profit of young scholars," so that they "may see verse for verse turned as far as the phrase of the English permitteth."⁴³ Like *Thyestes*, *Hercules furens* alternates only between acts in fourteeners and choral odes in pentameter quatrains, and Heywood follows Latin word order, often creating awkward, obscure sentences. Braden identifies one example of this awkwardness: *Quid matres loquar / passas et ausas scelera?* ("Need I speak of the mothers who have suffered and committed crimes?" 386–87).⁴⁴ Heywood translates: "What should I the mothers speak,/ Both suffering and advent'ring guilts?" (E3^r). This English makes sense only when referring back to the Latin. In the words of one critic, the translation overall is "clumsy and frequently obscure" (Evelyn Spearing 1912, 17).

Although he published his translation in 1563, Alexander Neville translated his *Oedipus* in 1560, and may have been inspired by Heywood's *Troas*, which appeared only a year earlier in 1559. Like Heywood in *Troas*, Neville also translates relatively freely, deleting, adding, and substituting passages. It is striking, however, that Neville justifies his departures as a way to better achieve the original purpose of Seneca's tragedy. As he explains: he aims to convey what "Seneca himself in his invention pretended," which (in Neville's terms) was "by tragical and pompous show upon the stage" to encourage virtue, or more specifically, "to admonish all men of their fickle estates, to declare the unconstant head of wavering fortune, her sudden interchanged and soon altered face, and lively to express the just revenge, and fearful punishments of horrible crimes, wherewith the wretched world in these our miserable days piteously swarmeth" (a3^v). For this reason, Neville explains, he was not "too precise in following the author word for word, but sometimes by addition, sometimes by subtraction to use the aptest phrase in giving the sense." Later, he

42 On Heywood's translation style in *Thyestes*, see Ker and Winston 2012, 29–45.

43 Heywood 1561, title page.

44 Quoted in Braden 2010, 267.

similarly asserts that although the translation is “in word and verse far transformed,” it is in “sense little altered” (a7^v). Neville’s translation often disrupts Seneca’s concise epigrammatic style, as in the following example: *Fatis agimur, cedite fatis* (“We are driven by fate, and must yield to fate,” 980). In Neville, this becomes: “Our life with tumbling fatal course of Fortune’s wheel is rolled. / To it give place, for it doth run all swiftly uncontrolled” (E5^r).⁴⁵ It is notable that Neville thoroughly revised his translation for republication in Newton’s *Tenne Tragedies*, but while most of the lines in the re-issue have at least minor revisions, Neville did not revise these two lines at all. Perhaps he was content to let his expansive translation of this epigram stand; it indeed seems to achieve his stated, original aim: to “little alter” the sense, even with “word and verse far transformed.”

In contrast to Heywood’s varied approaches, and Neville’s relatively free translation, John Studley remains consistent across his four translations. He rarely adds or deletes scenes, and tends to parallel Seneca line-for-line. Where he does amplify, he heightens emotional effect or assists the reader with mythological background. Even contemporaries remark upon these tendencies.⁴⁶ For instance, W.R. suggests the emotional appeal of Studley’s translations, when he writes that his version of *Agamemnon* can “set on fire” the minds of readers.⁴⁷ Thomas Nuce describes how Studley explains “hidden stories” in order to “make his poet plain.” For this reason, according to Nuce, Studley creates a free-standing translation: He sometimes seeks “to expound” and “to comment sometimes eke,” “so that to understand this book,” the reader “need no farther seek.”⁴⁸ One useful example of Studley’s approach to translation to amplify emotional and explanatory effect occurs in *Medea*, when Medea reacts to Jason’s abandonment of her.⁴⁹ In Seneca, Medea asks, *merita contempsit mea / qui scelere flammās viderat vinci et mare?* (“Did he hold my services cheap, though he had seen fire and sea overpowered by my crime?” 120–21). Studley expands (B5^v–B6^r):

O hath he such a stony heart that doth no more esteem
The great good turns and benefits that I employed on him,
Who knows that I have lewdly used enchantments for his sake:
The rigor rough and stormy rage of swelling seas to slake?

45 This example comes from Braden 2010, 267–68.

46 See Ker and Winston 2012, 51–6.

47 Quoted in Ker and Winston 2012, p. 212, l. 4.

48 Ibid., p. 208, ll. 7–10.

49 This example is drawn from Spearing 1912, 40.

The grunting, fiery, foaming bulls, whose smoking guts were stuffed
 With smouldering fumes that from their jaws and nostrils out they puffed,
 I stopped their gnashing, munching mouths, I quenched their burning
 breath,
 And vapours hot with stewing paunch that else had wrought his death.

Studley's translation amplifies to include more details about Medea's efforts for Jason, and in so doing, encourages readers more fully to understand and sympathize with her emotional state. Yet, like Neville, Studley's translations, whether expansive or direct, sometimes lose the epigrammatic elegance of the original. One example is Studley's translation of one of Clytemnestra's famous lines in Seneca's *Agamemnon*: *per scelera semper sceleribus tutum est iter* ("For crimes the safest path is always through crimes," 115). Studley renders the line more obscurely: "The safest path to mischief is by mischief open still" (Ker and Winston 2012, 2.1.12).

In contrast to the other translations, Thomas Nuce does not use fourteeners in *Octavia*. Moreover, he makes no major alterations to the choral odes and rarely amplifies the translation. Also, unlike the other translations, he makes little attempt to describe or justify his approach, although he does excuse the work as the "first fruits of my young study."⁵⁰ Nuce's translation style is evident in his opening lines. In the pseudo-Senecan original, Octavia describes the sunrise (1–4):

Iam vaga caelo sidera fulgens
 Aurora fugat:
 surgit Titan radiante coma
 mundoque diem reddit clarum.⁵¹

Nuce renders the lines:

Now that Aurore with glittering streams
 The glading stars from sky doth chase,
 Sir Phoebus pert, with spouting beams,
 From dewy nest doth mount apace,
 And with his cheerful looks doth yield
 Unto the world a gladsome day. (Bir)

50 Nuce [ca. 1566], sig. A3^v.

51 Now Dawn's brilliance / sweeps the wandering stars from the sky; Titan arises radiance-crowned and returns bright daylight to the world.

Nuce does not reproduce Latin word order. He is more formal and less colloquial than Studley.⁵² He expands slightly in order to intensify the sense of joy at the opening of the day, perhaps to heighten the contrast with the following lines about Octavia's *tot tatis onerata malis* ("so many weighty troubles," 5). Nuce enhances the personification of Dawn and Titan/Phoebus, making them more active, as though waving their "glittering streams" and "spouting beams." He also makes the Sun into a "pert" (i.e. lively, sprightly, alert) and "cheerful" gentleman (a "sir"), perhaps rendering him more approachable than a "radiance-crowned" king. Nuce also turns "bright daylight" (*diem . . . clarum*) into "gladsome" (i.e. pleasant or joyous) day, as though the day itself is happy to begin. The words "glading" (perhaps an old spelling of "gliding," or the word "gladding," meaning "rejoicing") and "gladsome" are examples of Nuce's preference for words with Old and Middle English roots over Latinisms.⁵³ Braden describes the translation as "capable of affecting if unsteady gravitas" (2013, 268).

Even as the translators rendered Seneca in their own ways, they made local choices to accommodate the tragedies to an English context. One example is the word "estate." The term derives from and is used as a translation for the Latin *stare* (to stand), but it appears in contexts related to fortune, appealing to specific resonances with English feudalism and the notion of the 'three estates' (nobility, clergy, and peasants). In *Troas*, Heywood uses the term eleven times, twice in the opening eight lines. Hecuba warns those who "set delight" in their "proud estate" (in Latin, *magna potens* or "royal power"). They will discover "How frail and brittle is th'estate of pride and high degree" (*quam fragile loco starent superbi*, or "how unstable is the place where the proud stand," 5–6). Neville introduces the term in two of his freely composed choruses, admonishing in one (also mentioned above), "See, see the miserable estate of princes' careful life" and warning in another that one can lose the "pomp and pride/ That unto kings' estate belongs" (E5^v). In Studley's *Agamemnon*, a Chorus also refers to: "Fortune that dost fail the great estate of kings" (1.Chor.1), a version of the Latin *O regnorum magnis fallax Fortuna bonis* ("O Fortune, beguiler by means of the great blessings of thrones," 56–57).

Another instance of accommodation to an English context lies in the Christianizing of the plays. In the medieval and Renaissance periods, many commentators and translators thought Seneca's ideas were compatible with Christianity. Thus the English translators call Seneca a "Christian Ethnic" (Neville, A3^r; Studley 1566, A2^v). In *Oedipus*, Neville also describes the trag-

52 See also Spearing 1912, 44.

53 Spearing 1912, 44.

edy to readers as a lesson in divine retribution. The tragedy shows “a very express and lively image of the instant change of fickle Fortune in the person of a prince [...], by mere misfortune, nay rather by the deep, hidden, secret judgments of God, piteously plunged in most extreme miseries” (a5^v–a6^r). Nevertheless, the translators also adapted the works to assimilate them more directly to a Christian framework. Studley’s *Medea*, for instance, eliminates a chorus on religious grounds: because “in it I saw nothing but an heap of profane stories and names of profane idols; therefore, I have altered the whole matter of it” (A3^v). Moreover, the translators routinely Christianize ancient Roman conceptions of the afterlife, turning Hades into hell, a tendency that is pronounced in the two most religiously zealous translators, Studley (a Puritan) and Heywood (a devout Catholic). In Seneca’s *Agamemnon*, Cassandra refers to Cerberus as *Tartari saevum canem* (“savage hound of Tartarus,” 751). Studley translates: “churlish mastiff, cur of hell” (3.2.176). In the Latin *Hercules Oetaeus*, the Chorus asks, *discedet via Tartari, fractis ut pateat polis?* (“Will the path to Tartarus part to make room for the fractured skies,” 1119–20). In Studley, the Chorus uses the term “hell,” contrasting this with the heavens: “The beaten highway unto *hell* is like away to pass,/ To lead unto the *heavens* that shall be laid flat” (my emphasis; Newton, 205^r). Heywood makes similar, often more extensive, changes. In the Senecan *Troas*, Andromache states, *Stygis profundae claustra et obscuri specus* (“The barriers of the deep underworld and its dark caves are opening,” 430–31). In Heywood, she says, “The caves and dens of *hell* be rent for Trojans’ greater fear” (3.1.21). In *Hercules furens*, Hercules has hastened to see the “gloomy dead” (*maestos . . . manes*; 187); in Heywood, the “sorry sprights of hell” (C5^r). Moreover, Heywood dwells on the idea of hell in his freely composed additions. The added Ghost of Achilles uses “hell” seven times in ninety-one lines, and in Thyestes’s speech, added to *Thyestes*, the term appears eight times in sixty-two lines.

Even with these Christianizing tendencies, specific religious beliefs—Heywood’s fervent Catholicism or Studley’s radical Protestantism—do not appear to have coloured the translations in more doctrinaire ways. A case in point is the seemingly Catholic-inflected term “Limbo lake,” a translation for Hades, and words associated with it, including Styx, Lethe, Tartarus, or Acheron. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the phrase first appears in a translation of the *Aeneid* (1558) by Thomas Phaer, who may have been Catholic.⁵⁴ Heywood does not use the phrase in his translations, but he does employ it in his “Preface” to *Thyestes* (Ker and Winston 2012, line 313). Neville, Studley, and Nuce use the term. In *Oedipus*, the priest opens Hades, summoning

54 Philip Schwyzer, “Phaer, Thomas (1510?–1560),” in Goldman 2004 (accessed June 27, 2014).

the dead king and bringing forth "throngs" (*ille populos*; 607). Neville describes where the "throngs" come from: "those shapes and forms that flew from out of Limbo lake" (C6^r). Studley uses the term repeatedly. In *Agamemnon*, the ghost of *Thyestes* contends: *nonne vel tristes lacus / accolere satius* ("Is it not better to dwell even near those dismal lakes," 12–13). Studley translates the line: "Nay, better were it not to haunt the loathsome Limbo lakes" (1.1.13). Nuce uses the term twice in his *Octavia*. In one instance, Nuce's ghost of Agrippina tells her dead husband to raise his "spritish face" from "Limbo lake" (D2^v). The Latin original reads, *exere vultus Acheronte tuos* ("Raise your eyes from Acheron," 338). For the translators, "Limbo" seems to be a generic reference to a pagan netherworld.⁵⁵

4 Critical Reception

For readers today, the style of the passages cited above—the bobbing fourteens, dogged rhyme, and persistent alliteration—may seem jarring and even inept. It is worth recognizing, then, that contemporaries praised these translations, lauding Heywood's "smooth and filed style,"⁵⁶ his "thundering verse,"⁵⁷ and his "learned and painful [i.e. painstaking] translation."⁵⁸ John Studley seems to have been directly inspired by Heywood, and Neville, writing that "other tragedies which are set forth [by them] are so excellently well done" that they make "Seneca himself to speak in English."⁵⁹ Others describe Studley as an heir to Heywood's legacy. A commendatory verse in *Agamemnon* praises Studley as Heywood's equal, whose "pains" "lesser praise deserveth not than Heywood's work hath done."⁶⁰

Since this early reception, however, the style of these works has not been viewed positively. As early as the 1560s, Roger Ascham criticized the overuse of rhyme by many translators of the period, including those who worked on Seneca, who were "carried away by time and custom to content themselves with barbarous and rude rhyming" (1570, R4^r). This stylistic censure dominates many modern critical assessments as well. C.J. Herington memorably characterizes the experience of reading the translations: "Pleasure one feels, but it

55 On the phrase "Limbo lake," see also A.B. Taylor 1987, 193–95.

56 "T.B. to the Reader," in Ker and Winston 2012, p. 216, l. 2.

57 "R.W. to the Reader," in Drout 1570, sig. A3^v.

58 Arthur Hall 1581, sig. A2^v.

59 Quoted in Ker and Winston 2012, p. 219, ll. 10–13.

60 "T.B. to the Reader," quoted in Ker and Winston, p. 216, lines 23–24.

is akin to the pleasure of ruins, rambling, whimsical, repetitive in their effects [...]” He continues: “For us, however, the luxuriance of such oddities, the lack of proportion or selection at any point, the relentless alliteration, the numbing ding-dong rhythm of the fourteeners, page after page—all these things make it difficult to treat the translations seriously as works of art” (1966, 422–71). Herington captures the spirit of many early, twentieth-century takes on the translations, which focused on style and the relative fidelity of the translations.

Other early twentieth-century criticism on the first English translators also tends to focus on the accuracy of the translations and the quality of the verse, and in general the verdict was not positive. Henri de Vocht, the first modern editor of Heywood’s plays, writes: “Heywood’s versification is not very brilliant. His verse is uncouth, and especially in the last tragedies, disfigured by recurring botches [...] and ungainly inversions that testify to a servility to the rhyming form, rather than to a mastery over it” (1913, xxxi). Evelyn Spearing, the first modern editor of Studley, describes his verse as “homely and popular,” with often “jingling” alliterative phrasing, such as “thwacking thumps,” “mingle-mangle” (i.e. confusion), “flim-flam” (i.e. nonsense), and “slibber-slabber sauce” (i.e. repulsive concoction).⁶¹ She observes: his “dramatic powers and sense of poetic fitness do not seem to have been of a high order. He often falls into bathos exactly in the moments where he wishes to be impressive” (1912, 37–38). C.S. Lewis was unimpressed with the translations, complaining: “All the sharp detonations of the original [...] disappear in the yokel garrulity of their style.”⁶² T.S. Eliot is one exception to this early critical line. In his influential essay on “Seneca and Elizabethan Tragedy,” first published as an introduction to a 1927 reprint of Newton’s *Tenne Tragedies*, he insists that it is not appropriate “To examine [their] lines under the microscope.” He continues: the fourteener is not well-adapted to Latinate vocabulary, and so “the miracle is that Heywood and [John] Studley made as good a job with it as they did” (1: li and lii).

In the past decade or so, criticism on these works has instead examined the tragedies in relation to the political climate of Renaissance England. All of this is deeply indebted to Braden’s account of Seneca’s political relevance for the European Renaissance in *Renaissance Tragedy and the Senecan Tradition: Anger’s Privilege* (1985). Here, Braden examines the distinct imperial, autarchic “style of selfhood” in Seneca’s tragedies. He further argues that the Renaissance predilection for Seneca grows out of the period’s increasingly authoritarian, centralized, and imperialistic nation-states, which again made possible a tyrannical, autarchic style of selfhood in rulers of the day. Dramatists

61 Spearing 1912, 37, and Spearing 1913, 231.

62 C.S. Lewis 1954, 254.

ranging from Shakespeare to Racine employed Senecan motifs, styles, and modes to represent and to criticize this style of rule. *Anger's Privilege* did not explore the first English translations of Seneca, but in the past ten years, critics have developed many of Braden's insights in relation to these works, albeit with different and, at times, opposing emphases. An initial essay in this area, "Seneca in Elizabethan England" (Winston 2006) demonstrates that the translations of Seneca served multiple purposes, helping to foster personal and professional connections, while promoting the political thinking of their authors and readers. Linda Woodbridge (2010) has furthered this work, arguing that the Senecan translations promulgated a specific strain of political thought, mid-sixteenth-century resistance theory (the right to resist, and even depose, the monarch). Quite differently, however, Allyna Ward (2013) has read the plays as supportive of the monarch. Looking at queens in *Troas* and *Medea*, she argues that these plays are potentially supportive of Elizabeth, since they explore the "gross injustices of silencing women in the political realm based on gender bias" (95).

Inspired by the rise in translation studies as an important subfield in early modern studies, another strain of criticism has returned full circle to issues of style and translation. In an essay on "Tragedy" in the *Oxford History of Literary Translation in English*, Braden provides an overview of the Senecan translations, focusing on style (266–69). *Elizabethan Seneca*, a recent edition of Heywood's *Troas* and *Thyestes* and Studley's *Agamemnon*, also aims to highlight the individual style and aims of each of the translations.

Alongside these trends in the discussion of the 1560s specifically is another, more dominant, sustained critical trend that focuses on the Senecan influence in later sixteenth-century drama. The first book in this area is J.W. Cunliffe's *Influence of Seneca on Elizabethan Tragedy* (1893), which demonstrates the importance of Seneca for later English Renaissance drama, and includes a helpful appendix of parallel passages in Seneca and in Renaissance tragedies. The most important book on this subject, however, is arguably H.B. Charlton's *Senecan Tradition in Renaissance Tragedy* (1921). Originally published as an introduction to an edition of Sir William Alexander's *Monarchike Tragedies*, Charlton's essay charts the influence of Seneca on Italian, French, and English Renaissance drama. He argues that Italy fostered both 'academic' and 'popular' versions of Seneca. While 'academic' Seneca was picked up in France, the 'popular' version developed in England.⁶³ In 1967 and 1974, G.K. Hunter offered an important corrective to Cunliffe and Charlton, writing two articles that

63 This French Senecan tradition had an influence on the English reception of Seneca. The neo-Senecan plays of Robert Garnier were translated from French into English, for instance by Mary Sidney Herbert as *Antonius* (1592) and Thomas Kyd as *Cornelia* (1594).

questioned the definition and nature of “Senecan influence”: How do we know Senecan influence when we see it, especially since Elizabethan tragedy has multiple sources that are synthesized together into a new whole? Since Hunter, critics have been careful to talk less about “influence” than about “reception,” focusing on the dynamic and inventive ways that later sixteenth-century playwrights deploy Senecan styles, devices, and themes in their plays. For instance, in *Shakespeare and Classical Tragedy: The Influence of Seneca* (1992), Robert Miola examines three different genres in Shakespeare, not just tragedy, to show how Shakespeare interacts with important Senecan concepts, such as *furor*. With the exception of a few pages in Charlton, most of this work on “influence” focuses almost exclusively on Seneca’s influence in *later* sixteenth-century drama. Very little criticism has attempted to piece out the *specific* influence of the early English translations on later Elizabethan drama.

5 The Influence of the Early Translations

There is little evidence to support Nashe’s complaint that later sixteenth-century playwrights plundered “English Seneca” for phrases and passages. Indeed, the most extensive borrowing from “English Seneca” in the period occurs in a play that Nashe likely would not have known. In the early 1580s, schoolboys in a northern English town performed *A Tragedie Called Oedipus*, a mash-up of Neville’s revised version of *Oedipus* (1581) and Thomas Newton’s *Thebais* (1581), with a truant schoolboy scene from Thomas Pickering’s *Horestes* (1567) and original verse that often alludes to other contemporary literature, such as John Lyly’s *Euphues* (1578) and *Euphues: His England* (1580).⁶⁴ Shakespeare borrows lines from Studley’s *Medea* and *Agamemnon*, but the extent of his and other playwrights’ debts to English renditions of the tragedies, I would argue, does not extend beyond incidental allusions. Rather, the Elizabethan translators and adaptors are an important part of the story whereby Seneca, the author of witty and moral tragedies, came to be seen also as Seneca, a resource for writing political tragedy.

Prior to the 1560s, references to Seneca in sixteenth-century England primarily point to his reputation as a political counsellor to Nero and as a moralist, not as a tragedian. Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516) and William Baldwin’s *Treastise of Moral Philosophy* (1547) favourably mention Seneca as an outspoken counsellor to Nero. A character in Baldwin’s *Mirror for Magistrates* (1559) mentions Seneca also as a moralist, saying:

64 Martin Wiggins 2011, 14–15.

O moral Senec, true find I thy saying
 That neither kinsfolk, riches, strength, or favour,
 Are free from Fortune, but are ay decaying. (sig. G3^r)

The saying could come from almost any of Seneca's works, although the phrase "moral Senec" suggests that Baldwin was thinking of Seneca the 'moral philosopher,' i.e. the prose writer. Indeed, Baldwin may not have thought that this "moral Senec" was the same person as the tragedian. For, there was some question in the period about whether Seneca, the philosopher, and Seneca, the tragedian, were the same person. Some thought that Seneca's father, Seneca, the Elder, who was also a rhetorician, wrote all of the prose works now attributed both to him and to son, and that his son (Seneca, the younger) wrote only the tragedies.⁶⁵ As late as 1579, Thomas Lodge wrote that "Seneca, though a stoic, would have a poetical son" (sig. A1^r).

After the 1560s, when authors mention Seneca, they emphasize his tragedies, and focus on their political potential, especially to curb monarchic tyranny. For instance, the prologue to the play *Cambises* (pub. 1570), a drama about the ancient Persian tyrant, mentions Seneca:

The sage and witty Seneca, his words thereto did frame
 The honest exercise of kings; men will ensue the same.
 But contrary-wise, if that a king abuse his kingly seat,
 His ignominy and bitter shame in fine shall be more great.⁶⁶

The prologue emphasizes Seneca's style, morality, and politics, and implicitly connects these with drama, since the praise occurs in the preface to a tragedy. In his *Apology for Poetry* (1581), Philip Sidney quotes from Seneca's *Oedipus* to illustrate the role of tragedy, which "maketh kings fear to be tyrants, and tyrants manifest their tyrannical humours" (45). In his *Discourses upon Seneca the Tragedian* (1601), Sir William Cornwallis connects Seneca's tragedies to politics when he copies out moral and political sayings from the plays, including several on kingship, and explicates their meaning. To give just one example, the first quote in *Discourses* comes from Seneca's *Oedipus*. Echoing the sentiment of Atreus in *Thyestes*, Oedipus says to Creon: *Odia qui nimium timet regnare nescit: regna custodit metus* ("One unduly afraid of being hated is incapable of ruling; a throne is safeguarded by fear," 703–4). Commenting on these lines, Cornwallis concludes that rulers inculcate fear in their subjects, since

65 On the tradition of the "two Senecas" see Ker and Winston, 7–10.

66 Thomas Preston 1570, sig. A2^r.

“out of subjects’ fear groweth princes’ safety,” although how the prince creates fear can lead either to tyranny or good government (A1^r–A2^r).

It has long been recognized that Elizabethan dramas, and particularly tragedies, promote the political thinking and engagement of audience members. As Jean Howard puts it (2003, 322): “Part of the work of early modern tragedy is to desacralize kingship and evacuate dominant ideologies of power;” Shakespeare, in particular, “let himself contemplate the undoing of greatness and the fragility of rule.” The first English translators and adaptors of Seneca helped to establish this cultural role for tragedy in England, and later playwrights built on this foundation. At the same time, ways of working with Seneca changed over time: writers shifted from creating complete translations and fully-realized adaptations to producing more novel works, peppered with sporadic, sometimes even playful adaptations and allusions. Thus, to return to the *Spanish Tragedy*, Hieronimo carries Seneca with him, cites Seneca, is inspired by Seneca. The play contains a ghost, and characters speak in the quick, barred style of Senecan dialogue. Moreover, Hieronimo’s deliberations about revenge—to leave justice to God, or to the state, or to himself—are part of a larger, neo-Senecan theme in the play concerning the nature of justice and its relation to revenge. In the play, revenge becomes an option because religion and the state fail to provide Hieronimo with justice for the murder of his son. “Revenge on the Elizabethan stage,” in the words of one critic, “is a perverted form of justice.”⁶⁷ Seneca, in other words, helps to develop the political concerns at the heart of the play. That said, the *Spanish Tragedy* is not a neo-Senecan play in the spirit of *Gorboduc*. It switches between multiple locales, introduces subplots and minor characters, and ends with a play-within a play, none of which are obviously Senecan in origin.

In later sixteenth-century England, large, purpose-built, public theaters were constructed the first time in England. The rise of the public theater is its own story, too large to be told here, but suffice it to say here that the public theaters created a vibrant and competitive environment for drama. Within this commercial realm, playwrights—such as Kyd, Marlowe, and Shakespeare—were forced to innovate continually. For this reason, they did not create neo-Senecan plays like *Gorboduc* or even *Misfortunes*, adapting British or other stories within an obviously Senecan dramatic form. Instead, they creatively improvised: they combined Senecan “sentences” and “speeches” with other dramatic and literary forms in fresh and unexpected ways, and in the process, they developed new kinds of dramatic stories and new forms that would draw audiences. Moreover, as Eric Dodson-Robinson has argued, later Elizabethan

67 G.K. Hunter qtd. in Woodbridge, 9.

dramatists, especially Shakespeare, looked to Senecan tragedy and Stoic philosophy to explore concerns other than immediately political ones—what happens after death? Is the universe just? Do humans have control over their lives?⁶⁸ Furthermore, as Dodson-Robinson has also shown, Shakespeare often developed themes that, while inspired by Seneca, frequently opposed Seneca's own views.⁶⁹ All the while, however, English Renaissance playwrights continued to draw on Senecan sentences, forms, speeches, and characters to explore various themes, especially the extremes of political power. The presence and persistence of this theme in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century tragedy is a principal legacy of the first major phase in the English reception of Seneca in the 1560s.

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68 2009; 2013, esp. 83–85, 94, 98–100; introduction to this volume.

69 Ibid. Also see Patrick Gray's chapter, this volume.

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Shakespeare vs. Seneca: Competing Visions of Human Dignity

Patrick Gray

Critical examination of the possibility that Senecan tragedy influenced Shakespeare has moved through several distinct phases. Early interest in verbal parallels and analogous literary conventions met with resistance from critics such as G.K. Hunter who sought to emphasize Shakespeare's debt to medieval English drama, rather than classical Latin precedent. More recent scholarship, however, such as that of Robert S. Miola tends to present Shakespeare as well-versed in Senecan tragedy. Critics such as Gordon Braden, A.J. Boyle, and Colin Burrow, as well as Miola, have assembled illuminating studies of local allusions to Seneca's tragedies in specific plays. Most studies of Shakespeare's reception of Seneca tend to remain somewhat superficial, however, engaged with a myriad of discrete formal details, rather than diving deeper into more synthetic, probing questions of meaning, values, and worldview. How is Shakespeare the thinker responding to Seneca the thinker? I argue here that the most important distinction between the two playwrights is a difference of opinion about human dignity. Shakespeare's Christian sensibility leads him to undermine and overturn Seneca's more typically classical sense of human grandeur.¹

The study of Shakespeare's reception of Seneca began in earnest at the turn of the twentieth century. John Cunliffe assembled enthusiastic, somewhat undigested lists of verbal parallels between Senecan drama and Elizabethan tragedy. Not long after, Henry B. Charlton and F.L. Lucas made some effort to integrate and expand upon this initiative, identifying formal conventions which Elizabethan dramatists seem to borrow from Seneca.² The most influential author in this regard, however, was T.S. Eliot. Eliot contributed a sympathetic introduction to a reprint of Thomas Newton's *Tenne Tragedies*, where he

1 Auerbach argues that the advent of Christianity unsettled and ultimately dispelled long-standing classical assumptions about human dignity and literary decorum. See, e.g. Auerbach 2003, 39–40 on *humilis*. For Auerbach on Shakespeare, see the “The Weary Prince” (2003, 312–33).

2 For a thorough list of these conventions, see Miola 1992, 3.

defended the value of these early English translations as poetry.³ He also drew attention to the possibility of a connection between Seneca and Shakespeare in an address at the Shakespeare Association in London, later published as an essay, "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca."

A look at a few instances quickly shows the attraction of comparing specific passages, as well as some of the potential difficulties. Two quotations from Seneca's *Hippolytus* appear in Latin in Shakespeare's early revenge play, *Titus Andronicus*. When Titus learns that his daughter, Lavinia, was raped by Chiron and Demetrius, he speaks out angrily against what he sees as the injustice of the gods, that the two men should remain alive. "*Magni dominator poli / Tam lentus audis scelera, tam lentus vides?*" ("O ruler of the great heaven, / how are you so slow to hear crimes, so slow to see them?" 4.1.81–82). The outburst combines *Pha.* 671–72 with *Ep.* 107.11, suggesting an imperfectly-remembered commonplace. Earlier in the play Demetrius, consumed with lust for Lavinia, describes himself as in hell: "*per Stygia, per manes vehor*" ("I am carried through the region of [the river] Styx, through [the realm of the] shades," 1.1.635). This line simplifies and slightly mangles *Pha.* 1180, "*per Styga, per amnes igneos amens sequar*" ("I [Phaedra] will madly follow you [Hippolytus] through Styx, through fiery rivers").⁴ Unfortunately, however, for those who would see an open-and-shut case for Senecan influence, both of these Latin quotations appear in sections of the play which some critics ascribe to a collaborator, George Peele, rather than to Shakespeare himself.⁵

Aside from *Titus Andronicus*, the two plays that have attracted the most attention from critics looking for the influence of Senecan tragedy are *Macbeth* and *King Lear*. *Macbeth*'s hesitation to kill King Duncan, torn as he is between pity and ambition, plays out in soliloquies that recall not only Hamlet, as well as Brutus, but also Senecan antiheroes such as Medea, Clytemnestra, and Aegisthus.⁶ *King Lear* ends in a startling affront to theodicy, the death of Lear's innocent daughter, Cordelia, and contains passages that recall the frequent complaints about the cruelty and injustice of the gods that can be found throughout Seneca's tragedies.⁷ "As flies to wanton boys are we to th'

3 See Eliot 1950.

4 For further discussion of these parallels, see Miola 1992, 13–15 as well as Burrow 2013, 183.

5 See Jackson 1979, 148–58 and Vickers 2002, 148–243, esp. 179.

6 *Med.* 25–27, 40–43, 893–994; *Thy.* 176–204, 283–84, 324; *Ag.* 49–52, 108–15, 198–202, 228–43. See Belsey 1973 and Boyle 1997, 181–82 on *dubitatio*.

7 Cp. *Pha.* 959–88, 1238–43, 1271–72; *Oed.* 75, 667, 1042; *Med.* 29, 439–40, 1026–27; *Tro.* 51–57, 351–69, 524, 528, 743–44, 763, 768–79, 981–90, 1056; *Thy.* 122–35, 407, 1006–21, 1092–102; *Phoen.* 243–51; *Her. O.* 205–53, 299–302, 519, 645–46, 850–64. See Rosenmeyer 1989, 183 on what he

gods./ They kill us for their sport" (4.1.38–39). Macbeth's famous soliloquy, "Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow," evokes an analogous sense of nihilism and despair.⁸ Turning to specific passages, it is easy to multiply instances of striking parallels. Macbeth's conceit that his blood-stained hand will turn the sea red recalls Hippolytus's lament that the entire ocean could not cleanse him of the shame of Phaedra's proposition.⁹ Lear's vow to do "such things," he knows not what, "but they shall be/ The terrors of the earth" (2.4.280–82), recalls Atreus's ominous vow that his revenge will be *nescioquid animo maius et solito amplius* ("something greater, larger than usual, beyond human limits," 267).

Nailing down a case for immediate influence can be difficult, however. For instance, Cunliffe finds an echo of Seneca's *Agamemnon* in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. As he plots to kill Banquo, Macbeth justifies his decision with a Senecan argument: "things bad begun make strong themselves by ill" (3.2.56). The line seems, at least, to allude to a turning point in one of Clytemnestra's soliloquies, as she stiffens her resolve to kill her returning husband: *per scelera semper sceleribus tutum est iter* ("The safe way for crimes is always through crimes," 115). Cunliffe acknowledges, however, that variations on this aphorism also appear in numerous other contemporary plays, including Marston's *Malcontent*, Webster's *White Devil*, and Jonson's *Catiline*.¹⁰ As Jessica Winston has explained in the previous chapter, Senecan tragedy was so popular in Elizabethan England that Thomas Nashe could poke fun at the trend, accusing playwrights of copying Seneca "line by line and page by page." As a result, it is difficult to discern whether Shakespeare encountered Senecan tragedy directly or indirectly.

Even if Shakespeare did read Seneca's plays, another further question still remains. Did he read them in Latin, or in English translation? Gordon Braden dismisses the fourteener verse of the Newton translations as "numbing" and "infuriating." The idea that they might have inspired Shakespeare seems to him inconceivable. "We have at present no strong reason to think that they will ever be established as significant influences in the development of Elizabethan

calls Senecan *Schreirede*, "the heightened speech whereby the character (or the chorister) deflects his glance from his own person and frantically looks for sympathy in the presumptively 'sympathetic' universe."

8 Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 5.5.19–28.

9 Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 2.2.58–62; cp. *Pha.* 715–18.

10 Cunliffe 1893, 24–5.

poetry, dramatic or otherwise" (Braden 1985, 173).¹¹ On the opposite side of the debate, Reuben Brower finds it "unlikely and beyond proof" that Shakespeare himself ever "read the full text in Latin of any play by Seneca." Instead, he argues, "the translators will be our surest guide" (1971, 148–49). M.L. Stapleton acknowledges that scholars tend to "betray embarrassment at what they perceive as bad poetry, bad playwriting, bad translation" (2000, 17). Nevertheless, he argues, "the Newtonians serve as our invaluable guides for Shakespeare's Senecan explorations, excavations, and conquests" (22).

Probably the best evidence for Shakespeare's familiarity with the 1581 translations is that he seems to parody them in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in the repertoire of the "rude mechanicals."¹² As Colin Burrow explains, the language of these mid-century Tudor translations "would have sounded slightly 'antiqued' even at the time of their composition" (2013, 172). By the turn of the century, however, as Shakespeare began writing, their prosody would have seemed downright laughably outmoded. Bottom proudly attests that he could "play Ercles rarely," then declaims a few lines, as a taster (1.2.31–38):

The raging rocks
And shivering shocks
Shall break the locks
Of prison-gates;
And Phibbus' car
Shall shine from far
And make and mar
The foolish fates.

This spoof recalls two passages from John Studley's translation of *Hercules Oetaeus*.¹³ "Phibbus' car" appears in the opening two lines, *Sator deorum, cuius excussum manu / utraeque Phoebi sentient fulmen domus* ("Sire of the gods, whose hand launches the thunderbolts felt by both homes of Phoebus..."), which Studley translates, "O LORDE of Ghostes whose fyrye flashe (that forth thy hand doth shake)/Doth cause the trembling Lodges twain of Phoebus car to quake..."¹⁴ "Raging rocks" that "break the locks" appear in Deianira's

11 Hunter is even more caustic. "It is a pity that the supposed historical significance of the 1581 volume has caused it to be twice reissued [i.e. in 1927 and 1964]." (1967, 194).

12 See Engel (1903) and Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. Brooks (1979, lxii–lxiii, 139–45).

13 See Koeppel (1911, 190–91) and Miola (1992, 181 n. 8).

14 Seneca, *Hercules Oetaeus*, trans. Studley, 2: 193; cp. *Her. O.* 1–2.

nurse's boast about the scope of her magic powers, *habuere motum saxa, discussi fores / umbrasque Ditis* ("rocks have started to move; I have shattered the doors and darkness of Dis"), which Studley renders as "the roling rocks have quaking sturd, and none thereat hath pusht. / Hell glouummy gates I have brast oape."¹⁵ Shakespeare combines the first two lines of Studley's translation, as if to signal his source, with a bit from the interior appropriate to the speaker in question: Bottom. Like Deianira's nurse, Bottom is a lower-class character, claiming unusual power. He is attempting to help, in this case, Peter Quince with his casting decision, and, as with Deianira and her nurse, his solicitous attention does more harm than good. M.L. Stapleton argues that Bottom's lines as Pyramus, as well, echo Alexander Neville's translation of Seneca's *Oedipus* (2000, 26). Searching for his beloved Thisbe, Pyramus bewails the obscurity of the encroaching darkness: "O grim-look'd night! O night with hue so black! / O night, which ever art, when day is not! / O night, o night! alack, alack, alack" (5.1.170–72). This bathetic lament resembles that of Neville's *Oedipus*, as he curses the day: "O cursed fatall day, / O mischiefs great, O dreadfull times, O wretch, away, away."¹⁶

Stapleton argues further that Peter Quince's painfully awkward prologue, "If we offend, it is with our good will," etc., is intended as a parody of the Newton translators' introductions (5.1. 108–17). "Their laborious prefaces contain the same curious fusion of defensive humility and apologetic pride" (2000, 24–25). Nor is Shakespeare's mockery of these authors necessarily limited to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Among several other, more minor instances, Robert Miola cites the example of the character Pistol, who appears in brief scenes scattered throughout Shakespeare's second tetralogy of English history plays. "Pistol's speech, a veritable catalogue of declamatory mannerisms, represents Shakespeare's most obvious parody of Senecan style" (1992, 182). Miola also argues that Shakespeare's critique of Senecan drama in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* extends beyond a simple send-up of an obsolete poetic style. "Both of Bottom's impersonations—Ercles and Pyramus—focus ridicule on Senecan self-dramatization, on the habit of taking one's self too seriously" (1992, 187).

As Stapleton maintains, "parody is tribute" (2000, 26). Despite such evidence, however, towards the middle of the twentieth century, arguments for Seneca's influence on Shakespeare began to meet with vehement objections. Whether Shakespeare's exposure to Seneca was posited at first- or second-hand, in English or in Latin, claims about his reception of Senecan tragedy

15 Ibid. 2: 210; cp. *Her. O.* 458–59.

16 Seneca, *Oedipus*, trans. Neville, 1:230. The line is interpolated into *Oedipus*'s final speech, 1042–61, without any clear-cut basis in the original Latin.

became targets for vociferous debunking. Willard Farnham and Howard Baker proposed that recurrent formal features such as tyrants, ghosts, and lurid violence might be more plausibly ascribed to the abiding influence of medieval English drama. In his monumental study of Elizabethan grammar school curricula, T.W. Baldwin found “no indication” that Shakespeare read Seneca in Latin, and no “evidence worth repeating” that he read Seneca in English, either (1944, 2: 560).¹⁷ According to Baldwin, Shakespeare’s engagement with Senecan drama would not have been likely to have gone beyond schoolboy exercises, translating scattered *sententiae*.¹⁸ If Shakespeare was aware of Senecan tragedy in any deeper sense, it was at most indirectly, through intermediaries such as fellow playwrights. Baldwin (1947) argued further that Terence, not Seneca, was the model for Shakespeare’s characteristic five-act structure.¹⁹

The most categorical rejection of Seneca’s influence on Shakespeare, however, came from G.K. Hunter (1967; 1974; 1978, 159–73).²⁰ Like Farnham and Baker, but with much more bite, Hunter argued that conventions in Elizabethan drama such as stichomythia which appear to be derived from Senecan tragedy can instead be better understood as a legacy of traditional English morality plays and mystery cycles. “If Seneca’s tragedies had not survived,” he writes, “some details would have had to be changed—but the overall picture [sc. of Elizabethan drama] would not have been altered” (1967, 21). In his summaries of extant debate, Frederick Kiefer (1978; 1983; 1985) is more moderate, but on balance tends to side with Hunter.²¹ Kiefer urges the reader to be careful to distinguish between likely sources for academic drama, written in Neo-Latin, and theater such as Shakespeare’s which was written in English for a popular audience.²² Seneca thus comes across as a rarefied taste; an obscure companion of the Latinate University Wits.

Subsequent scholarship continues to call into question the severity of this critical rejection.²³ As Burrow explains, “there is an overwhelmingly strong *prima facie* case that Shakespeare read and was influenced by Seneca” (2013, 162). Reflecting on Baldwin’s account of Shakespeare’s education, Burrow

17 For a more recent analogue of Baldwin (1944), see Gillespie (2004).

18 Contrast Eliot (1934, 37): “I think it is quite likely that Shakespeare read some of Seneca’s tragedies at school.”

19 Baldwin, *Five-Act Structure*.

20 Cp. Bevington (1962).

21 For other review essays, see Borgmeier 1978 and Frank 1997.

22 See Kiefer 1978, 18. On connections between *Titus Andronicus* and Cambridge productions of Senecan tragedies, see in contrast Smith 1988, 242–43.

23 See Miola 1992, Braden 1985, 171 ff., and Martindale and Martindale 1990, 30–44.

concedes his argument about grammar school, but pushes back against his argument about Shakespeare. Surely Shakespeare's "reading life," he points out, did not end at fourteen. An argument based on school curricula has inherent limits. John Hazel Smith (1967) identifies fifty printings of Seneca's tragedies before 1600. Bruce R. Smith (1978) catalogues thirty-seven translations of the plays into vernacular languages by the same date. "Seneca cannot be too heavy, nor Plautus too light" (2.2.401–2): when Shakespeare's Polonius introduces a crew of traveling players as "the best actors in the world" (2.2.397), he cites Seneca as the most prestigious form of tragedy, the *ne plus ultra* of their art, and it seems unlikely that his opinion would have been altogether unconventional. Sir Philip Sidney, for instance, praises *Gorboduc* for "climbing to the height of Seneca his style" (1963, 38).

In retrospect, the underlying premise of the Farnham-Baker-Hunter line of argument also seems questionable. Simply to find a possible alternative source for a given trope in Elizabethan tragedy is not an adequate argument against Seneca's influence. Similar formal features can convey disparate sensibilities, depending on how they are used. Gordon Braden agrees with Hunter, for example, that passages akin to classical stichomythia can be found in medieval English plays. He also points out, however, that its instances in the English vernacular tradition feel very different from the intense verbal combat found in Seneca's tragedies. Stichomythic interaction in Senecan drama has a distinctive tone: it serves as a power struggle, "a test of . . . self-possession" (1985, 181).²⁴ Commenting on Baker's criticism of Cunliffe, M.L. Stapleton observes what he calls a "troublesome fact" (2000, 29): although revenge can be found in medieval English drama, it is not an obsessive theme, the way it often is in Senecan tragedy; the emphasis lies elsewhere. Again, the feel, the import, of the material in question is very different.

Nevertheless, as Burrow observes, scepticism about the influence of Senecan tragedy, conscious or unconscious, continues to pervade much of Shakespeare scholarship. "Editors of Shakespeare's plays . . . have been astonishingly reluctant to discuss Seneca in their introductions, or to record even evident and well-established parallels in their notes" (2013, 163). Burrow is probably right to suspect two unjustified biases at work, resulting in this curious critical blindness: among Shakespeareans, an entrenched view of Shakespeare as an untutored, quintessentially English folk artist, 'warbling his native woodnotes wild,' and, among classicists, a longstanding prejudice against the aesthetics themselves of Senecan drama, as somehow inferior to Attic and Augustan

24 Cp. Martindale and Martindale 1990, 31, as well as Boyle 1997, 163.

precedent.²⁵ Seneca is seen in comparison as too dissonant, garish, brutal, grotesque, hyperbolic, rhetorical, etc.

Shakespeare and Seneca both operate outside neoclassical ideals of clarity, order, and decorum: Winckelmann's *edle Einfalt und stille Größe* ("noble simplicity and quiet grandeur"). Shakespeare's disorder, however, has long been represented as charming, naïve, and proto-Romantic, whereas Seneca's as a decline, a failure to live up to his classical predecessors. To posit Seneca as a source for Shakespeare, Shakespeare as embracing Silver Age Latin drama, disrupts this vision of literary history. Thus, perhaps, critics' reluctance to look deeper into Shakespeare's debt to Seneca. Happily, in recent years, the aesthetic merits of Senecan drama have come in for a reappraisal, at least among classicists.²⁶ Nevertheless, among Shakespeareans, Seneca *tragicus* remains at present still surprisingly unfamiliar: a vaguely disreputable, poorly understood figure.

The reaction against early studies of Senecan influence did have some salutary effect, however, insofar as it prompted reconsideration of the methods themselves of source-study. Lists of comparable passages such as those compiled by Cunliffe, Charlton, and Lucas may be a useful starting point, but they are not on their own an adequate guide to the complex interaction between one author and another. Hunter is wrong to dismiss Seneca's influence altogether, but he is right to want more than a bare list of parallels, and to suggest that studies of reception should consider the interaction between multiple texts and authors, rather than focusing on a single source in artificially-imposed isolation. The critics who then have best responded to this challenge are Gordon Braden and Robert Miola. Of these two, Braden is the more cohesive and penetrating, but he omits Shakespeare almost entirely, in favour of a broader discussion of European Renaissance tragedy. Miola moves through Shakespeare's works systematically, play-by-play, identifying local allusions and adaptations of Senecan literary conventions. However, he tends to avoid large-scale, synthetic comparison of the two authors. In fact, Miola at times outright denies any systematic engagement between Shakespeare 'the thinker' and Seneca 'the thinker.'²⁷ "Shakespeare's debt to Senecan drama," he writes, "is principally a

25 "Then to the well-trod stage anon, / If Jonsons learned Sock be on, / Or sweetest Shakespear fancies childe, Warble his native Wood-notes wilde[.]" Milton, "L'Allegro," 131–34.

26 For further thoughts on the merits of Seneca's aesthetic choices, see Boyle 1997, 15–31, as well as the sources listed in Stapleton 2000, 136 n. 36 and Burrow 2013, 274.

27 For Shakespeare as a "thinker," see Nuttall 2007.

matter of style, a matter of rhetorical pose and gesture, replete with a cluster of familiar images and motifs" (1985, 193).²⁸

Miola's conclusions belie this statement: he depicts Shakespeare as fairly consistently rejecting what he calls the Senecan "style of selfhood" (1985, 193). Nevertheless, he does tend to emphasize small-scale questions of form. It seems likely, therefore, that the next step in the analysis of Seneca's influence on Shakespeare will be the integration of these two approaches, Braden's and Miola's.²⁹ Does Braden's broad-strokes argument hold true for Shakespeare? As Braden maintains, "the more visibly Senecan features of Senecan rhetoric are not just a repertoire of varied effects, but have a corporate coherence as instruments of a particular style of selfhood; and at that level there is a serious affinity between Senecan tragedy and Renaissance tragedy" (1985, 66).

What is needed, in other words, is a study of Shakespeare's engagement with Senecan subjectivity. What vision of the world, of the self, does Senecan tragedy present? And how does Shakespeare respond to that vision? At the end of his seminal essay, "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca," Eliot issues what amounts to a critical challenge. "The influence of Seneca on Elizabethan drama has been exhaustively studied in its formal aspect, and in the borrowing and adapting of phrases and situations; the penetration of Senecan sensibility would be much more difficult to trace" (1934, 53–54). And in fact, turning back to Braden, perhaps the quickest way to understand his account of the influence of Seneca on Renaissance tragedy is to see it as precisely the project which Eliot imagines. Braden sets out to identify what, exactly, "Senecan sensibility" might be, and then to trace its "penetration" in Renaissance tragedy.

Eliot begins by rejecting the idea that Shakespeare "deliberately took a 'view of life' from Seneca." For purposes of comparison, he cites the example of Dante and St. Aquinas: Dante had "one coherent system of thought behind him," "the system of St. Thomas, to which his poem corresponds point to point." Not so Shakespeare; Seneca did not provide him with "a 'philosophy'." What can be identified, however, as a legacy of Senecan tragedy is what Eliot calls "a new attitude," "the attitude of self-dramatization assumed by some of Shakespeare's heroes at moments of tragic intensity" (1934, 38). This "stoical attitude" is "the reverse of Christian humility," and it "culminates," as he sees it, in his own time, in "the attitude of Nietzsche." It is "the refuge for the individual in an indifferent or hostile world too big for him" (1934, 47–48).

28 Cp. Emrys Jones 1977, 272 who suggests that "Shakespeare's use of Seneca" is "more a matter of glancingly rapid effects than of a laborious working out of correspondences."

29 See, e.g. Boyle 1997, 167–92 for an analysis of "ideological indebtedness" to Seneca in Renaissance tragedy in general, including Shakespeare.

As examples, Eliot cites various heroes in the plays of Marston and Chapman, as well as Shakespeare's Coriolanus, Mark Antony, and Othello. He also singles out Othello for more detailed treatment. Confronted by an obvious error, his ill-considered murder of his own innocent wife, Othello adopts "an *aesthetic* rather than a moral attitude, dramatizing himself against his environment." His focus is not on his victim, Desdemona, but instead on his own self-esteem, his perception of his own dignity. "He takes in the spectator, but the human motive is primarily to take in himself." In his final speech, Othello is not primarily, as he might seem, acknowledging his own guilt, or even admitting his own human fallibility, but instead is "*cheering himself up*," "endeavouring to escape reality" (1934, 39). He tries to re-embiggen himself; to see himself once again as powerful, god-like.³⁰ Eliot sees this effort as "pathetic," and he suggests that Shakespeare shares his perspective. "I do not believe that any writer has ever exposed this *bovarysme*, the human will to see things as they are not, as clearly as Shakespeare" (1934, 40).

Braden's striking achievement is not only to develop this brief sketch of a Senecan "attitude" into a more fully developed account of Senecan "autarkic selfhood," but also to explain its connection to Seneca's philosophy. Braden proposes that the Stoic wise men such as Cato and Socrates whom Seneca exalts in his philosophical treatises and the furious, unrestrained avengers such as Medea and Thyestes whom he places at the heart of his tragedies are in fact variations on a single theme, θυμός, the competitive drive which St. Augustine criticizes as *libido dominandi* ("lust for dominance"), and Nietzsche celebrates as *der Wille zur Macht* ("the will to power"). Both types, the philosophical sage as well as the tragic antihero, strive to achieve what is, in the end, an unattainable fantasy: absolute, unquestioned, and unassailable personal autonomy, akin to that of a Roman emperor. They want to be, as Braden says, 'autarkic': themselves (αὐτός) the origin (ἀρχή) of everything about themselves.³¹

"Imperial aggression and Stoic retreat are both informed by a drive to keep the self's boundaries under its own control . . . Stoicism is in this regard but the inner form of imperialism" (Braden 1985, 23). According to Braden, Stoicism is not the opposite of *furor*, but instead its "internalization": "one manifestation of drives that, swerving in another direction, lead to the rage of Seneca's madmen" (1985, 21). Thus it makes sense that Medea can adopt in earnest the *sententiae* of a Stoic, or that Hamlet oscillates between "declamatory fury" and "relentless self-laceration" (1985, 30). Brutus and Cleopatra only seem to be

30 "A noble spirit embiggins the smallest man." Springfield town motto, *The Simpsons*, Season 7, episode 16: "Lisa the Iconoclast."

31 For the concept of "autarkic selfhood," see Braden 1985, 2; 303.

opposites; the Stoic and the *femina furens* are in fact two sides of the same coin, two versions of the same preoccupation: an obsession with personal honour. "Stoicism is the natural alternative to revenge because it is a twin endeavour, a complementary strategy for establishing the self's belief in its own dignity and power" (1985, 218–19).³²

In his discussion of Seneca's influence on Shakespeare's tragedies, Miola shows that this "passionate style of selfhood" leads to what he calls "grand, if solipsistic, apotheosis," as well as "cosmic disaster" (1992, 193). A character such as Othello or Lear manages to see himself for a time as god-like, titanic, only to have that delusional sense of power prove false, in the end, as he confronts the unhappy consequences of his mistakes. Miola's argument intersects here with Eliot's, as well as Braden's: the insatiable ambition of the "Senecan self" leads to what Eliot calls *bovarysme*, and Braden, "a fantasy of individual autonomy" (1985, 57). Reality will not accommodate the tragic protagonist's sense of himself, so he opts instead for a different, more private reality, one in which he can be larger than life, even if only temporarily.³³ Turning to Shakespeare's last plays, Miola argues that these final tragicomedies present a deliberately opposed moral vision: "a change of heart, usually articulated as a repudiation of the Senecan self" (1992, 188). This "pivot" or "turning," he adds, occurs in "a Christianized context of sin and repentance." "Individual apotheosis gives way to humble contrition, tragic disaster to comic reconciliation" (1992, 193).³⁴

Braden for his part discerns a rejection of Seneca's *Weltanschauung* even earlier in Shakespeare's career, in *Hamlet*. Shakespeare introduces a new and alien element, Christianity, into the progress of a Senecan revenge plot, and well-nigh brings it to a crashing halt. Fear of guilt in the eyes of a Christian God prevents Hamlet from participating in the Senecan moral universe. "The prospect of Stoic withdrawal, no less than that of murderous action, spawns an unmanageable anxiety." Hamlet is "excluded from the satisfactions of either revenge or Stoicism—and those satisfactions subtend a whole universe of human values" (1985, 220). In an essay on *Thyestes* and *Hamlet*, Eric Dodson-Robinson argues still more strongly for "a striking contrast between Seneca's and Shakespeare's dramatic visions": "a programmatic challenge to the

32 See also Stapleton 2000 for Shakespeare's engagement with the Senecan convention of the *femina furens*.

33 Cp. Bromwich 2010 on other tragic heroes in Shakespeare's plays such as Macbeth and Lear tending, like Othello, towards what Eliot calls *bovarysme*: self-aggrandizing self-deception.

34 Cp. Boyle 1997, 173; 179.

worldview and values of Senecan tragedy.” Both tragedies begin with something like original sin.³⁵ In Seneca’s *Thyestes*, however, crime begets crime, without hope for improvement, whereas in *Hamlet*, Christian virtues enable some degree of redemption. “The brotherly forgiveness exchanged between Hamlet and Laertes inverts the dual prayers for vengeance uttered by Atréus and his brother at the conclusion of *Thyestes*.”

All of these critics’ conclusions suggest that further analysis of Shakespeare’s reception of Seneca will require making sense of what Dodson-Robinson identifies as “axiological” differences. Shakespeare and Seneca do not share the same values. Although they may use the same trope or dramatic convention, even the same phrase, their aesthetic choices are informed by different assumptions about morality, and this incongruity of sensibility can give their use of similar formal features a very different effect, in context. Another, more arresting way of making this basic point would be to say that Shakespeare and Seneca fundamentally disagree about the nature of human dignity, and that this disagreement affects their art. What is it about a human being that is or can be *dignus*, that is, worthy of approval? What qualities do we admire in ourselves, or in others?

As Christopher Star explains, Seneca’s Stoicism was attractive to his contemporaries, as well as accessible, because he describes “personal *imperium*” metaphorically, in the familiar language of “military and political *imperium*,” but casts it as superior: more respectable and more desirable (2012, 23). Matthew Roller attributes this reorientation of aristocratic Roman ambition to a lack of opportunity within the Empire for more traditional advancement: “the unavailability of independent military commands for most aristocrats, along with the disappearance of concomitant military honors” (2001, 66).³⁶ What is admirable, however, in Seneca’s thought is still, as it was for Nero, or for most other Romans, to be in control, in command. Self-rule is the imperative, the *summum bonum*. To be ‘autarkic’ is the aim: in the words of Shakespeare’s Coriolanus, to “stand,/ as if a man were author of himself” (5.3.35–36); even if that independence requires horrifying, pitiless cruelty; even if it means self-destruction.

This vision of human dignity is precisely what Shakespeare sets out to upend. For Shakespeare, Seneca’s tendency to idealize untrammelled independence does not seem liberating, as it did to Marlowe or to Chapman, but instead tragically misleading. Human beings are naturally and inextricably dependent

35 Cf. Gillies (2013) on original sin in *Hamlet*.

36 For similarities, in this respect, between Imperial Rome and Elizabethan England, see Rebhorn 1990.

on each other; to attempt to stand apart from all others, like Coriolanus, “a lonely dragon” (3.3.30), is a doomed and even foolish enterprise. Characters such as Shylock or Malvolio who strive for imperious, pitiless control over others end up in situations that are not only unhappy, but also ignominious.³⁷ They end up contemptible, weak, even laughable: from their perspective, an outcome very literally worse than death.³⁸ In the words of Alexander Pope, “there are some who would rather be *wicked* than *ridiculous*.”³⁹ True dignity consists instead, paradoxically, in the deliberate recognition of human limitation. What Shakespeare admires is not brutal dominance, but instead what is aptly described in Christian theology as *κένωσις* (“self-emptying”): the voluntary surrender or delegation of individual agency.⁴⁰ The height of human dignity, as Shakespeare sees it, is the power to relinquish power itself as an ethical aim; to give up the Senecan dream of self-mastery in the interests of a greater good: compassion.⁴¹

In ancient Rome, *dignitas* was all but inseparable from social standing. In its most precise sense, *dignitas* denoted the potential to participate in the *cur-sus honorum*. It is the social capital, the broad-based approval, necessary in order to participate in Roman political life.⁴² Its sense is thus somewhat different from that of its English cognate, “dignity.” For example, authors such as Cicero, Quintilian, and Livy use the term *dignitas* not only to refer to a personal quality, but also as a synonym for high political office, or as short-hand for an office-holder himself, as in the English term, “dignitary.”⁴³ *Dignitas* as an individual attribute is grounded, in the final analysis, in the ability to exercise political power. That is to say, in more direct language, what is admirable, *dignus*, in a human being is ultimately his capacity to command other people: to dominate them, master them, force them to his will. Other personal characteristics such as noble birth, martial prowess, and masculinity (*virtus*) are also worthy of respect, insofar as they enable this kind of *imperium*. But their value

37 See Boyle 1997, 183–84 on revenge backfiring in Renaissance adaptations of *Medea* and *Thyestes*.

38 Cleopatra and Brutus both kill themselves in order to avoid being led in triumph.

39 Letter to the Earl of Burlington, March 7, 1731.

40 See Phil. 2:5–11 for the New Testament touchstone of this aspect of Christian theology.

41 Seneca himself argues against *misericordia* in his essay *De Clementia*.

42 For further analysis, see Rosen 2012. The Roman sense that human worth depends on the ability to exercise some degree of political agency might well seem disturbing, in its implications. Are the powerless therefore worthless? Nevertheless, for classical authors, *dignitas* tends to be inseparable from political influence. See, e.g. Balsdon 1960 on the difficulty of reconciling *dignitas* with *otium*.

43 For instances, see *dignitas* in Lewis and Short, *Latin Dictionary*.

is secondary, instrumental. Qualities such as being male, high-born, wealthy, well-spoken, or successful in battle are all merely means to a more important end: relative goods, rather than absolute. What matters most is, instead, a more private, internal sense of individual agency. The aim above all, even the aim of political office itself, is to be able to see oneself as the agent, rather than the acted-upon.

Seneca's ingenious breakthrough, both in his philosophy and in his tragedies, is to recognize that this characteristic Roman craving for individual control, the drive that St. Augustine calls *libido dominandi*, can conceivably be satisfied in other ways than the traditional patrician pursuit of high office at home and military conquest abroad. The desire to feel powerful can, he imagines, be fulfilled internally, without the perils and the complications of involving other people. *imperare sibi*, he writes, *maximum imperium est* ("To rule oneself is the greatest empire," *Ep.* 113.31). Under pressure from increasingly erratic and domineering Julio-Claudian rule, Seneca found in Greek philosophy what must have felt like a welcome escape-hatch. Hellenistic schools of thought such as Stoicism and Epicureanism provided a pressure release, an alternative to the intense, dog-eat-dog Roman world of competition for command over others.

But is the autonomy that these systems promise truly attainable? In his essays and epistles, Seneca argues for the practicability of Hellenistic ethics, making few concessions. As proof of the possibility of radical self-control, he cites the example of historic figures such as Cato, Socrates, and the Greek philosopher Stilbo. He urges his correspondent, Lucilius, to retire from public affairs, in keeping with the precepts of Epicureanism. In his tragedies, however, writing about figures of Greek legend, Seneca gives much freer rein to his doubts. Self-possessed characters who maintain exemplary control over their own emotions seem few and far between. As Phaedra complains, *quid ratio possit? Vicit ac regnat furor* ("What can reason do? Madness has conquered and rules me," 184). When her attendant urges her to suppress her desire for her stepson, Phaedra replies point-blank, *quae memores scio / vera esse, nutrix; sed furor cogit sequi / peiora* ("I know that what you say is true, nurse; but madness forces me to follow the worse path," 177–79). Variations on this *domina-nutrix* debate occur in *Medea* and *Agamemnon*, as well as other tragedies: Jocasta with Oedipus in *Oedipus*, Ulysses with Andromache in *Troades*.⁴⁴ Stoic suppression

44 *Pha.* 100–357; *Med.* 150–56, 173–74, 381, 558–59; *Ag.* 125–43, 203, 225; cp. *Oed.* 81–86; *Tro.* 785–813; *Phoen.* 347–49.

of the passions figures less as a lived philosophy than as a hypothetical foil; its maxims are articulated, but then disregarded as impracticable.⁴⁵

The manifest tension between Seneca's tragedies and his professed philosophy has led over time to what Gregory Staley describes as "two schools of Senecan criticism: a moralistic school which assumes that the plays are a vehicle for Stoic teaching and a sceptical school which sees them instead as utterly unconcerned about morality or even hostile to it" (2010, 5). One especially prominent example of what Staley calls the "sceptical school" is Alessandro Schiesaro's analysis of *Thyestes*, where Schiesaro argues that Atreus, the antagonist, "attracts the audience beyond and even against the purview of their ethical beliefs" (2006, 127). "There can be no doubt," he maintains, "where our aesthetic allegiances lie: with Atreus' energetic *poesis*, his mastery of words and puns, his ruthless determination to plot, stage, and act his revenge" (2006, 122). He is "cunning, funny, articulate, simply irresistible" (2006, 117). Schiesaro compares Atreus to Aaron in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, in whom, citing Jonathan Bate, he discerns a similar "satanic drollery."⁴⁶ Like Atreus, Aaron is a "master of words" who becomes, in effect, a playwright-within-a-play: he "engineers the larger part of the plot" and is "fully conscious of his metatheatrical role" (Schiesaro 2006, 72).

Within Shakespeare studies, the best-known analogue of Schiesaro's reading of Atreus is probably Stephen Greenblatt's uneasy fascination with Iago in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*. Much as Schiesaro with Atreus, Greenblatt sees in Iago an image of the playwright himself. "In *Othello*, Shakespeare seems to acknowledge, represent, and explore his affinity to the malicious improviser" (1980, 252). Shakespeare "possessed a limitless talent for entering into the consciousness of another" (1980, 252); so, too, Iago is "master of the vertiginous confounding of self and other" (1980, 229 n. 19). He is "demonically sensitive" (1980, 235), "an inventor of comic narrative" (1980, 234) capable of "brilliant improvisation" (1980, 246). "Iago is fully aware of himself as an improviser and revels in his ability to manipulate his victims" (1980, 233). He is "linked to the playwright or at least to the Vice-like 'presenter' of a play" (1980, 298 n. 16). Greenblatt is careful to maintain that "even in *Othello*, Iago is not the playwright's only representation of himself" (1980, 252). Nevertheless, the line blurs. Over the course of Greenblatt's account, Shakespeare and Iago become almost indistinguishable: Shakespeare, like Iago, is "the supreme purveyor of 'empathy', the fashioner of narrative selves, the master improviser" (1980, 253).

45 For further discussion, see Boyle (1997, 157–58) on "passion-restraint" scenes in Seneca and Shakespeare.

46 Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*, ed. Bate, 11; cited in Schiesaro 2006, 111.

William Blake famously said of Milton that he was “of the Devil’s party without knowing it.” Reviving what he calls the “moralistic school” of Senecan criticism, Staley, however, strongly objects to this tendency to identify, as Greenblatt does, an author with his most glamorous villain. Schiesaro, he protests, allows “Atrous ‘the playwright’ to define Seneca’s theory of tragedy.” “Would we allow Macbeth ‘the critic’ to interpret Shakespeare?” (2010, 120). Seneca in his account is more in control of his material than Schiesaro suggests. “Whereas Schiesaro,” he explains, “sees Seneca’s plays as the mad poet’s dreams, I read them instead as the analyst’s interpretations” (2010, 8). Seneca’s tragedies are designed to illustrate the disastrous effects of unchecked emotion. “Seneca’s plays regularly depict characters who are angry, frightened, or even in love, for passion was the Stoic explanation for the events traditionally considered tragic” (2010, 7).⁴⁷ Turning to Milton studies, an analogue of Staley’s reading of Senecan tragedy might be Stanley Fish’s response to Blake in *Surprised by Sin*. Milton’s ostensible sympathy for Satan early on in *Paradise Lost* is in fact a ruse. “The reader who falls before the lures of Satanic rhetoric displays again the weakness of Adam.” In leading the reader to recognize his own human “infirmity,” Milton aims to bring him “first to self-knowledge, and then to contrition” (Fish 1997, 38).

Gordon Braden presents a more troubling synthesis. Seneca’s tragic villains, like Nero and Caligula, are not as different from his Stoic *sapientes* as either Schiesaro or Staley seem to imagine. “Both insist on absolute control; the one destroying whatever resists his conquest, the other surrendering all interest in whatever falls outside his power . . . Senecan tragedy, dominated by versions of these two postures, is an exploration of their common ground: the self which will not deal with external reality except on terms of utter dominance” (1984, 286). Atrous’s exultant revenge in Seneca’s *Thyestes* and Cato’s triumphant suicide in Seneca’s epistles are not altogether incongruent. Both express the same core desire for control; both are at once an ostensible self-apotheosis and an appalling self-annihilation. “Senecan tragedy is the tragedy of the success of the human drive for moral and personal self-sufficiency, the drive for an autonomous selfhood that is subject to no order beyond itself. At their most genuinely harrowing, Seneca’s tragedies reveal that very success as a kind of horror” (1984, 285). The recurrent murder of children in Senecan tragedy, as in *Macbeth*, serves as a symbol of a “destructive cycle” which “spirals outward of

47 For a fascinating reading of Macbeth’s “brief candle” soliloquy, connecting it to a plausible Senecan source, Seneca’s discussion of *hic humanae vitae mimus* in *Ep.* 80.7, see Staley 2010, 9. Cf. Bromwich 2010, 143–45 on Macbeth in this speech, like Eliot’s Othello, “cheering himself up.”

its own logic to claim by the end something close to everything.” Here, however, Braden draws an important distinction between Seneca and Shakespeare. Shakespeare, he maintains, is much more thoroughly sceptical about this ‘style of selfhood’: “much more profound and clearer” in showing its limits and drawbacks. “To master life this way is to empty it.” Senecan drama “never quite steps outside” its antiheroes’ all-consuming “fantasies of vindictive fulfilment” (1984, 289). Shakespeare, in contrast, “never loses touch with the reality that ultimately resists and circumscribes any one man’s will” (1984, 290).

Like Seneca’s own tragedies, Shakespeare’s plays call into question Seneca’s philosophy, and by extension, the contemporary movement that he helped to inspire: Neostoicism. In *Much Ado about Nothing*, Leonato denounces the value of the conventional Stoic *consolatio* in no uncertain terms. “Cease thy counsel” (5.1.3), he tells Antonio, and again, “give me no counsel” (5.1.31).

I pray thee peace, I will be flesh and blood;
For there was never yet philosopher
That could endure the toothache patiently,
However they have writ the style of gods,
And made a push at chance and sufferance. (5.1.34–38)

Leonato refuses to hear any such “preceptual medicine” (5.1.24), any talk of “patience” (5.1.10, 19) unless the would-be “comforter” (5.1.6) has suffered, exactly as he has, the loss of a beloved child.

No, no; ‘tis all men’s office to speak patience
To those that wring under the load of sorrow
But no man’s virtue nor sufficiency
To be so moral when he shall endure
The like himself. Therefore give me no counsel[.] (5.1.27–31)

The same insistence that “philosophy” is useless also appears in *King John*, when Constance believes that she has lost her son, Arthur. “Patience, good lady!” (3.3.22) King Philip exhorts her. “No,” she cries. “I defy all counsel” (3.3.23). Cardinal Panulph intervenes, and she changes tack. “Preach some philosophy,” she asks, “to make me mad” (3.3.51).

For not being mad but sensible of grief,
My reasonable part produces reason,
How I may be deliver’d of these woes,
And teaches me to kill or hang myself. (3.3.53–56)

This type of exchange appears in *Romeo and Juliet*, as well, when Romeo learns that he has been banished. "I'll give thee armor to keep off that word," Friar Laurence reassures him: "Adversity's sweet milk, philosophy" (3.3.54–56). Romeo, however, is far from appeased. "Hang up philosophy!" he cries. "Unless philosophy can make a Juliet, / Displant a town, reverse a prince's doom, / It helps not, it prevails not; talk no more" (3.3.57–60).⁴⁸

When achieved Stoicism does appear in Seneca's tragedies, it is, as in his prose, in the form of a defiant, fearless death, showing no outward sign of pain or emotional distress. The most striking instance of such self-mastery occurs in the pseudo-Senecan *Hercules Oetaeus*, when Hercules helps to burn himself alive. *Nullus erumpit sonus* ("no sound burst from him"), Philoctetes recounts: *o durum iecur!* ("O tough heart!" 1731–32). True to Seneca's admiration of agency, the author emphasizes Hercules's activity, even as he is consumed (1740–44):

inter vapores positus et flammae minas
 immotus, inconcussus, in neutrum latus
 correpta torquens membra adhortatur, monet,
 gerit aliquid ardens. omnibus fortem addidit
 animum ministris: urere ardentem putes.⁴⁹

Hercules's dignity, represented here by his ascension to godhead, depends on his ability to remain powerful, in command, rather than a passive victim of the flames.⁵⁰ A similar emphasis on individual agency can be seen in Seneca's commentary on the suicides of Socrates and Cato the Younger in his essays and epistles, as well as his account of the executions of Astyanax and Polyxena in *Troades*. Astyanax *superbit* ("was fiercely proud," 1089); he mounts the wall *intrepidus animo* ("with a fearless spirit," 1093). *non flet e turba omnium / qui fletur* ("Of the whole crowd, he did not weep who was wept for," 1099–1100). *sponte desiluit sua* ("He leapt down of his own accord," 1102). Polyxena likewise refuses to be cowed: *audax virago non tulit retro gradum; / conversa ad ictum stat truci vultu ferox* ("the dauntless heroine [*lit.*, man-like woman] did not step back;/she stood facing the blow, frowning defiance," 1151–52). Even as

48 See also Bolingbroke's response to John of Gaunt's advice about his exile in Shakespeare, *Richard II*, 1.3.258–309.

49 Enveloped by the heat and the menacing flames, yet unmoved, unshaken, not twisting onto either side with his burning limbs, he gave encouragement and counsel, and remained active, all ablaze. He strengthened the courage of all his attendants: you would think him burning while being burnt!

50 For Philoctetes's complete description of Hercules's death, see *Her. O.* 1693–1755.

she succumbs to a massive wound (*vulnus ingens*), she still finds a way to strike out at her enemy, Achilles. *moriens adhuc / deponit animos: cecidit, ut Achilli gravem / factura terram, prona et irato impetu* ("in dying she still maintained her pride: she fell, so as to make the earth heavy for Achilles, face downward and with angry force," 1157–59).

Shakespeare's Roman plays include several important suicides, all of which in some respect evoke this Senecan template. In each case, however, Shakespeare introduces some element, comic or ironic, which calls into question the ostensible dignity of the suicide. Antony in *Antony and Cleopatra* is the most obvious example. He asks his servant Eros to kill him, but his servant kills himself instead. He then falls on his own sword, but does not die straightaway. Nor like Cato does he then proceed to tear out his own innards.⁵¹ Instead, he begs his attendants to finish him off. However, they, too, refuse, like Eros. Finally he is taken to Cleopatra; he asks to speak, but she interrupts him, railing at Fortune. Although he boasts of conquering himself, he seems in practice very far from in command. His last line is, "I can no more" (4.15.61). Later, when Cleopatra, too, decides to kill herself, her high-flying appropriation of Stoic tropes, "Now I am marble-constant" (5.2.239), etc., is interrupted by an encounter with a crass peasant: the "clown" who brings her the asp ("worm"), and who insists on making indecorous, phallic jokes about "joy o'th' worm" (5.2.278). In *Julius Caesar*, when Cassius kills himself, it is because his near-sightedness leads him to misread the outcome of a crucial battle. "Alas," Titinius says, "thou hast misconstrued everything" (5.3.84). Brutus also kills himself, but only after admitting that he believes that suicide is intrinsically dishonourable. His death thus comes across as an inconsistency, an expression of weakness. It is an act that he himself calls "cowardly and vile" (5.1.103).⁵²

Throughout his plays, Seneca repeatedly depicts Epicurean withdrawal from ambition, wealth, travel, and cities as the best possible mode of life.⁵³ Like Stoic suicide, Epicurean retirement from public life is presented as an escape from outside influence, with its attendant emotional distress: a retreat into a promised land of careless autonomy. The cure for the ills of boundless ambition is to withdraw from civilization itself: *non illum avarae mentis inflammatur furor / qui se dicavit montium insontem iugis* ("no madness of greed inflames

51 Plut. *Cat. Mi.* 70.6.

52 For the connection between Shakespeare's account of Brutus's shifting opinion about suicide and what he found in his main source, North's translation of Plutarch's *Lives*, see Braden 2014, 44–47.

53 *Pha.* 204–15, 483–552, 1123–42; *Oed.* 671–77, 687–93; *Med.* 301–29, 608–69, 260–74; *Thy.* 340–470; *Her. O.* 125–201, 325–28, 604–99.

the man who devotes himself innocently to the high hills," 486–87). Retreat from society preserves individual freedom, individual self-control: *autarkeia*. Hippolytus proclaims, *non alia magis est libera et vitio carens / . . . / quam quae relictus moenibus silvas amat* ("No other life is more free and blameless . . . than that which abandons city walls and loves the forests," 483–85). Nevertheless, no prominent character in Seneca's tragedies ever manages to shuck it all in this fashion, escape the entanglements of high position, and walk away from the imbroglios on-stage. Hippolytus attempts to do so, like Shakespeare's Timon in *Timon of Athens*, or Duke Senior in *As You Like It*.⁵⁴ Despite himself, however, Hippolytus is drawn back in; like Seneca himself, he finds himself subject, with or without his consent, to the whims and cruelty of contemporary court politics.⁵⁵ The only exception might be said to be the indistinct commoners of the Chorus. In *Thyestes*, the Chorus vows that it is content with its own anonymity (391–97):

Stet quicumque volet potens
 aulae culmine lubrico:
 me dulcis saturet quies.
 obscuro positus loco
 leni perfruar otio,
 nullis nota Quiritibus
 aetus per tacitum fluat.⁵⁶

Recalled from banishment by his brother, Thyestes himself, in keeping with the Chorus's perspective, considers going back to his exile in the woods.⁵⁷ *clarus hic regni nitor / fulgore non est quod oculos falso auferat* ("There is no reason for this bright lustre of kingship to blind your eyes with its false glitter," 414–15). Nevertheless, he accepts his brother's fatal invitation to return to court. In effect, he enacts the reverse of an Epicurean withdrawal.

For the most part, what we find in Seneca's tragedies is neither self-possessed Stoic suicide, nor its more moderate analogue, Epicurean retirement from public life, but instead, the same kind of all-consuming competition for political authority which Seneca repudiates, over and over again, as pointless

54 For Shakespeare's perspective on Epicurean retirement, see Gray 2014.

55 See Boyle 1997, 32 for further discussion of this comparison.

56 "Who wishes may stand in power on a palace's slippery peak: let sweet repose sate me. Set in an obscure place, let me bask in gentle leisure; unknown to any Quirites, let my life flow on through peace."

57 *Thy.* 404–70.

and unsatisfying. The Chorus in *Thyestes* asks, *quis vos exagitat furor, / alteris dare sanguinem / et sceptrum scelere aggredi?* ("What is this frenzy that drives you to spill your blood by turns and beset the sceptre with crime?" 349–51). Then it launches into well-worn Stoic paradoxes.⁵⁸ The true king is the Stoic *sapiens*, and he does not need wealth or military might (348–52):

rex est qui posuit metus
et diri mala pectoris;
quem non ambitio impotens
et numquam stabilis faovr
vulgi praeceptis movet[.]⁵⁹

But is it so easy to rest content? As Phaedra's attendant observes, *quod non potest vult posse qui nimum potest* ("he who is able to do too much wants to be able to do what he cannot do," 215).

Quisquis secundis rebus exultat nimis
fluitque luxu, semper insolita appetite.
tunc illa magnae dira fortunae comes
subit libido[.] (204–7)⁶⁰

In the world of Senecan tragedy, almost no-one is ever content to share political power. As *Thyestes* says, *non capit regnum duos* ("a throne has no room for two," 444). The same principle holds true in the domestic sphere, as well. Aegisthus warns Clytemnestra: *Nec regna socium ferre nec taedae sciunt* ("Neither thrones nor marriages can endure a partner," 259). Wives such as Medea, Clytemnestra, and Deianira refuse to share their husband with a mistress. Medea is incredulous at the very idea: *regias egone ut faces / inulta patiar?* ("Am I to endure this royal marriage unavenged?" 398–99).

Thus, in the world of Senecan tragedy, winning is unstable, because losers refuse to cede power graciously. In *Troades*, Ulysses recognizes the need to kill Astyanax, despite his pity for the boy's mother, Andromache; otherwise, he explains, the Trojans will rise again, and the cycle of revenge will continue.⁶¹

⁵⁸ *Thy.* 340–403.

⁵⁹ "A king is one who is rid of fear and the evil of an ugly heart; one that no wilful ambition or the ever shifting favour of the hasty mob can affect."

⁶⁰ "Those who grow too extravagant through prosperity, overflowing with luxury, are always seeking out the unusual. Then lust creeps in, that dire companion of good fortune."

⁶¹ *Tro.* 589–93, 736–38.

Losers in turn fight back so tenaciously, because winners tend to overstep the limits of their victory, trampling the defeated beyond the bounds of endurance. In *Troades*, Pyrrhus insists on sacrificing Polyxena on the grave of his father, Achilles, despite Agamemnon's advice that they should observe more restraint in victory.⁶² Pyrrhus scoffs at all talk of moderation: *quodcumque libuit facere victori licet* ("The victor has a right to do whatever he pleases," 335). Aegisthus warns Clytemnestra of her likely fate, if she allows Agamemnon to keep Cassandra as his consort: *feresne thalami victa consortem tui? / at illa nolet. Ultimum est nuptae malum / palam maritam possidens paelex domum*. ("Will you endure being bested and sharing your marriage bed? *She* will not! The worst disaster for a wife is to have a mistress openly in control of the marital household" 256–58). Anyone who does try to share power ends up vulnerable to betrayal, as in the case of Thyestes's return; to trust a rival may seem noble initially, but in time proves to have been a naive misstep.

Shakespeare captures this sense of doomed zero-sum competition in his Roman plays in the rivalry between Coriolanus and Aufidius in *Coriolanus*, as well as that of Mark Antony and Octavian in *Antony and Cleopatra*. When Antony's lieutenant, Enobarbus, hears that Octavian has imprisoned Lepidus, the third man of their triumvirate, his response is telling. "Then, world, thou hast a pair of chaps [i.e. jaws], no more,/ And throw between them all the food thou hast,/ They'll grind the one the other" (3.5.13–15). Compromise is inconceivable, and defeat is intolerable. In *Troades*, Hecuba describes the murdered Priam as "blest" (*felix*), because he does not have to endure being led in triumph, and the chorus of Trojan woman assures her that they agree.⁶³ Shakespeare's Cleopatra inspires her attendants to join her in killing themselves by harping in like vein on the indignity of being displayed as a trophy. "Shall they hoist me up/ And show me to the shouting varletry/ Of censuring Rome?" (5.2.54–56) Brutus admits to Cassius that his desire to avoid this kind of public humiliation is the real reason why he later kills himself, after his defeat at Philippi. "If we lose this battle," Cassius asks, "you are contented to be led in triumph/ Through the streets of Rome?" (5.1.107–9) "No, Cassius, no," Brutus replies. "Think not, thou noble Roman,/ That ever Brutus will go bound to Rome./ He bears too great a mind" (5.1.110–13).

"Too great a mind": the phrase invokes Aristotle's concept of μεγαλοψυχία, the pride of the "great-souled" man, and it also captures Brutus's participation in what Braden calls "Senecan" or simply "classical" selfhood.⁶⁴ Brutus

62 *Tro.* 203–348.

63 *Tro.* 142–63.

64 *Nic. Eth.* 4.3; cp. Braden 1985, 2.

is determined to remain “autarkic” to the end, author of all that happens to himself, even if that means killing himself. The same mindset drives the self-destructive revenge characteristic of Senecan tragedy. To commit suicide is an act of aggression, designed to rob the victor of some degree of agency, and to restore the dignity associated with that agency back to the defeated individual. Clytemnestra explains: *latus exigatur ensis et perimat duos; / misce cruorem, perde pereundo virum: / mors misera non est commori cum quo velis* (“The sword must be driven through your own side, if it cannot be otherwise, and slaughter two; mingle your blood, destroy your man by self-destruction: to die with someone you want to die is no wretched death,” 200–2).

Shakespeare, in contrast, and in keeping with the precepts of Christianity, sees dignity in accepting the limits of individual agency, as long as it is in the interests of compassion. The implicit model is Christ himself, who accepts the vulnerability of Incarnation, as well as the suffering of the Passion.⁶⁵ The most important expression of this acceptance of intrinsic human weakness is forgiveness, which includes not only pardoning others, but also acknowledging and making peace with one’s own particular sins and failures.⁶⁶ This about-face can occur in a comic vein: perhaps the best example is Benedick’s final speech in *Much Ado about Nothing*. Benedick vows never to succumb to the siren call of love; never to give up his prized autonomy for the various indignities of marriage. Rather than admitting their obvious attraction, he and Beatrice persist instead in what Leonato calls “a kind of merry war” of verbal banter, taunting and insulting each other (1.1.55–56). The effect is a romantic variation on the more deadly competition at the heart of the Senecan tragic vision, an interminable conflict fuelled by pride, with no possible outcome other than mutual injury. By the end of the play, however, Benedick relents. He and Beatrice confess their feelings for each other, and he proclaims himself delighted to wed his quondam opponent. “In brief,” he says, “since I do purpose to marry,

65 See Auerbach, e.g., on the “parallel” between the *sermo humilis* and the Incarnation 2000, 51, or on St. Peter and “the mingling of styles” 2000, 41–42: “This mingling of styles is not dictated by an artistic purpose. On the contrary, it was rooted from the beginning in the character of Jewish-Christian literature; it was graphically and harshly dramatized through God’s incarnation in a human being of the humblest social station, through his existence on earth amid humble everyday people and conditions, and through his Passion which, judged by earthly standards, was ignominious; and it naturally came to have . . . a most decisive bearing upon man’s conception of the tragic and the sublime.”

66 See Dodson-Robinson 2013, esp. 82, 90–92, and 97–100 for a reading of forgiveness in *Hamlet* vis-à-vis Senecan tragedy: “Forgiveness in *Hamlet* offers spiritual salvation in a materially corrupt universe. In allusive and often ironic ways, Christian virtues, juxtaposed with Senecan precedents, redeem ‘the primal eldest curse’ of betrayal” (82).

I will think nothing to any purpose that the world can say against it; and therefore never flout at me for what I have said against it; for man is a giddy thing, and this is my conclusion" (5.4.103–7).

This type of μετάνοια ("repentance," *lit.*, "change of mind") appears in a more serious light in *King Lear*, as well as Shakespeare's final tragicomedies. When he wakes up, no longer mad, Lear begs Cordelia for forgiveness, and admits that he is only "a very foolish, fond old man" (4.7.60). So, too, Leontes, when he recovers from his bout of paranoia. In the second half of *The Winter's Tale*, Leontes accepts precisely the same kind of re-evaluation of himself which Eliot, at least, maintains that Othello never entirely lets himself see, even in death. He abandons his former delusions of omniscience, and he blames himself unequivocally for the death of his wife. In *The Tempest*, after his servant, Ariel, chides him for cruelty, Prospero decides not to exact any further revenge on his shipwrecked countrymen.

Though with their high wrongs I am struck to th' quick
 Yet, with my nobler reason 'gainst my fury
 Do I take part. The rarer action is
 In virtue than in vengeance. (5.1.25–28)

Not only does Prospero pardon his brother, Antonio, but he also gives up his god-like "rough magic," not long after. This turn might seem as far from the Senecan ethos as it is possible to be. Miola describes it as "nothing less than a triumph over the Senecan self": "Prospero achieves self-creation by self-denial rather than self-assertion, by surrender rather than conquest" (1992, 214).

By the end of his career, Shakespeare stands in clear-cut opposition to classical admiration of human pride: Aristotle's μεγαλοψυχία. It would be reductive, however, to say therefore that Shakespeare altogether rejects the moral sensibility of Senecan tragedy. He is sensitive to Seneca's own ambivalence; he turns Seneca against himself. Antiheroes such as Medea and Atreus are only one aspect of Senecan drama. Shakespeare picks up on another side, as well, a sympathy and perhaps even a longing for a very different value-system, more akin to that of Christianity. The marked hesitation of characters such as Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, momentarily restrained by feelings of pity and horror, allows Seneca to articulate an alternative vision of morality, one in which empathy and forgiveness are paramount, even if in the end these characters act otherwise. Shakespeare recognizes this ambiguity and works within it to bolster what in Seneca's own vision tends to appear instead only as a recessive, hypothetical counterpoint.

For example, Leontes's repentance for his crimes against his own family is not wholly without precedent in Seneca's tragedies. Shakespeare appropriates

and adapts the end of Seneca's *Hercules furens*, when Hercules accepts that he must learn from his foster-father, Amphitryon, how to forgive himself. Another example is the similarity between the resolution of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* and the point at which Seneca breaks off his possibly-unfinished tragedy, *Phoenissae*. At the abrupt close, the two brothers, Polynices and Eteocles, still smolder with hatred for each other. It seems inevitable that they will resume their struggle for power. Nevertheless, taking the play as it is, it ends with Jocasta having established peace in Thebes. Her feminine compassion for both parties proves more powerful, more dignified, even if only temporarily, than their spiteful ambition for individual *imperium*.

Shakespeare ends *Coriolanus* with an analogous reconsideration of the possible dignity of compassion, forgiveness, and feminine weakness. Volumnia's ability to evoke Coriolanus's pity spares Rome from being sacked; as with Jocasta in *Phoenissae*, her intervention proves far more effective than the use of brute force. Coriolanus vows, "all the swords/ In Italy and her confederate arms/ Could not have made this peace" (5.3.207–9). "Ladies," he says, "you deserve/ To have a temple built you" (5.3.206–7). And in fact, his mother, Volumnia, and his wife, Virgilia, do re-enter Rome in triumph. Menenius proclaims, "This Volumnia/ Is worth of consuls, senators, patricians,/ A city full" (5.4.53–55).

Coriolanus's change of heart does lead to his death. Nevertheless, the same etiolated pity which leads him to abandon his march on Rome, and which he sees as a shameful weakness, appears in contrast to the audience as his most attractive quality. As A.D. Nuttall writes about Brutus, "his love for his wife and his grief at her death, 'affections' which Brutus is proud to be able to repress, actually redeem him as a human being" (2007, 185). The same kind of analysis might well be applied to Seneca himself. He is redeemed, in Shakespeare's eyes, by his own philosophical inconsistencies. Shakespeare discerns Seneca's doubts about his sense of human dignity, and he expands those misgivings into a comprehensive and more hopeful vision of an alternative ethical universe: the moral world of Christianity.

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PART 3

Seneca in the Modern Age and Beyond



Senecan Gothic

Helen Slaney

Over the course of the long eighteenth century, as the flood of English verse drama receded, the production of new plays acknowledged as Senecan gradually dried up. Their dramaturgical features, however, were displaced and absorbed into the flourishing sub-genre of Gothic melodrama. Although rarely making explicit reference to Seneca, this group of plays nevertheless exhibits a continuation of the aesthetic impulses and representational strategies, the spatial dynamics, vocabulary, and characterization that distinguish Senecan tragedy. At the same time, this unconscious and diffuse allusiveness opens us up to the possibility of recognizing Seneca's tragedies themselves as conforming to a Gothic, or at any rate a proto-Gothic formula.

It may seem odd to classify a classical author as 'Gothic.' According to its eighteenth-century Anglophone definition, the Gothic was synonymous with romance and medievalism, the Ancien Régime and Roman Catholic Europe, flourishing in an unenlightened, post-classical past.¹ Senecan tragedy, however, shares many of the attributes which, embryonically present in these formative texts, now affiliate a range of media under the trans-temporal rubric of the Gothic.² We are looking at similarities not in setting and plot, but rather in style and form. Seneca, filtered through Elizabethan translation, furnished Shakespearean, Jacobean, and Restoration tragedy with rhythmic and lexical devices for representing moments of crisis in a predominantly verbal theatrical medium. By the mid-eighteenth century, these devices had become so ingrained in English tragic discourse that their deployment no longer referenced Seneca directly, serving merely to graft their host-plays into an existing dramaturgical matrix.³ Few eighteenth-century playwrights would admit that

1 See Townshend 2008, 66 on Gothic polyvalence.

2 On the Gothic as a transhistorical category, see the essays in Punter 2012, which cover topics ranging from vampire fiction to graphic novels and Goth subculture. Kosofsky Sedgwick 1986 schematises "the central Gothic structure" (63) in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century fiction.

3 A similar process has been identified by Dudouyt 2012 in early modern French drama. An alternative reception model is the rhizome (Hardwick 2011).

the 'frigid' and 'bombastic' Roman tragedian had anything to offer,⁴ but when they turned for stylistic guidance back to Shakespeare, Webster, Otway, and Lee, it was these iconic passages—the ghostly vision, the ranting curse, the struggle with passion, the surrender to fate, the insatiable lust for revenge—whose recurrence signals that something Senecan survived.

The mutually informative relationship of Gothic melodrama and Shakespeare provides a comparable model for identifying contributory Gothic features in the genre's antecedents. Eighteenth-century performance culture fostered this interpenetration, as star actors John Philip Kemble and Edmund Kean appeared both in Shakespearean tragic roles with proto-Gothic propensities, such as Hamlet and Macbeth, and as popular Gothic villains (fig. below).⁵ This implicit conflation operated in two directions, adding Shakespearean stature to the Gothic while at the same time assimilating Shakespeare to the Gothic world of ruined castles and haunted avengers. Literary influence also runs both ways; as Jerrold Hogle argues,

The Gothic can help us retroactively define some of Shakespeare's own dramatic and symbolic choices, although it is technically an anachronistic category . . . We do not realise how thoroughly pre-Gothic Shakespeare is, in other words, until we look back through the Gothic to his most similar motifs and tendencies.⁶



FIGURE

Edmund Kean (as Richard III), by George Cruikshank.

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4 These words are Schlegel's as translated by Black in 1815.

5 Evans 1947, 87. See further the essays in Drakakis & Townshend 2008. On the 'haunting' of actors by former roles, see Carlson 2001.

6 Hogle 2008, 101–2.

A similar retroactive definition may be applied to Seneca, whose importance as a precursor to this theatrical milieu, albeit *sub rosa*, should likewise be recognized.

Seneca's tragedies themselves display a number of tropes whose coexistence gives them a Gothic cast. A stylistic propensity for applying hyperbolic and highly figured language to extremes of experience becomes the *sine qua non* of Seneca's theatrical afterlife. Typical instances include the imprecations that follow hard upon *anagnorisis* in *Oedipus* and *Thyestes*, or the outspoken anguish of Hercules and Theseus upon discovering that they have unwittingly committed filicide. As a dramaturgical mode or representational strategy, it is this penchant for baroque expressiveness in the face of catastrophe that draws Seneca into the orbit of melodrama; not in any pejorative sense, but rather in the sense that its flaring passions find vent in torrential, non-naturalistic soliloquy.⁷ "This cruel passion burns inside me like volcanic fire," confesses Phaedra (*Phaed.* 101–3); "I will overturn the world and annihilate it all," rages Medea (*Med.* 414); "I am a walking corpse, a toxic living filth," Oedipus execrates himself (*Phoen.* 36, 181, 216–20, 231–32).⁸ Rather than suppressing their turmoil, relying on psychological inference to engage their audience, Senecan speakers verbalize it, turning inner sensations into outward-facing sensationism. "Horror palpitates my heart—my limbs freeze—my breast is shaken" (*Med.* 926–27). Seneca's is a presentational, declarative theatrical mode, but this makes it more, not less, theatrical.

Florence Dupont has identified *furor*, *nefas*, and *dolor* as the three essential ruling principles of Seneca's dramatic universe,⁹ and they are equally indispensable to the Gothic. Senecan plots, like those of Gothic melodrama, are set in motion by the villain who superintends the suffering of others, either diabolically unrepentant like *Thyestes*'s Atreus, or pyrrhically implicated in her own designs like Medea. Revenge provides the primary motive, along with outdoing former crimes, be they one's own or those of one's ancestors. Such revenge may be calculated in scale and execution, but it is not rational. Seneca's arch-villains act in the grip of *furor*, frenzy or raging madness: Atreus calls on the *cohors Furiarum* (cohort of Furies) to possess him and inspire him to carry out some unthinkable deed, because *non satis magno meum / ardet*

7 "The characters are able to confront one another with full expressivity, to fix in large gestures the meaning of their relations and existence . . . Nothing is spared because nothing is left unsaid; the characters stand on stage and utter the unspeakable, give voice to their deepest feelings, dramatize through their heightened and polarized words and gestures the whole lesson of their relationship." Brooks 1984, 4.

8 All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

9 Dupont 1995.

furorē pectus, impleri iuvat / maiore monstro (“the madness firing my heart is not big enough, I want to be filled with some greater monstrosity,” 252–54).¹⁰ *Furor* can also manifest as erotic obsession, as in *Phaedra*, or psychotropic delusion, as in *Hercules furens*. Psychosis likewise provides eighteenth-century and later Gothic literature with one of its most enduring tropes, the lunatic and the asylum,¹¹ the fine mind snapping under unbearable duress and the microcosm of a world itself insane.

In the Senecan as in the Gothic cosmos, the conventional boundaries of nature and metaphysics are stretched, if not altogether dissolved. The presence of the paranormal asserts itself, whether conceived as the Stygian pit to which villains are consigned or the spiritual limbo issuing unquiet ghosts. The underworld erupts onstage in the prologues to Seneca’s *Agamemnon* and *Thyestes*; reported ghosts such as Achilles in *Trojan Women* and Laius in *Oedipus* appear by proxy; extended descriptions in *Phaedra* and *Hercules furens* take Seneca’s audience on a virtual tour of Tartarus’s topography. *Hic tibi ostendam inferos*, promises Juno (*HF*. 91): “I will show you hell, right here.” Senecan tragedy is haunted by the *nefas* (crimes) of past generations, its perpetrators unable to escape from horrors they are apparently locked into repeating. “It’s not your fault,” the chorus console the stricken Oedipus. “This is fate, and the Labdacid curse” (*fatis agimur; cedite fatis*, 980). Ghosts in the Gothic rupture the membrane between a material universe and something inexplicable beyond.¹² Eighteenth-century theater derived its ghosts in large measure, like its villains, from the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage, a tradition which was directly indebted to Seneca.¹³

The settings of Senecan tragedy likewise have Gothic affiliations. Both the suffocating palaces where the action (for the most part) plays out and the vast landscapes painted verbally in ode and soliloquy correspond to the typical duality found in Gothic fiction, where claustrophobic interiors such as the crypt or cell contrast vertiginously with the Sublime exterior wilderness.¹⁴ At the center of Atreus’s palace, the *penetrāle regni*, lies a secret grove where gloomy trees obscure the daylight, their trunks hung with rotting trophies of

10 Trans. Fitch 2004.

11 On Gothic madness, see Brewster 2012. The conventions of stage madness also come to Gothic drama via Jacobean treatments, as in *The Duchess of Malfi* (Webster) and *The Changeling* (Middleton & Rowley).

12 Varma’s observation in his seminal 1957 study that “Primarily the Gothic novels arose out of a quest for the numinous” has been followed up by Varnado 1987; other treatments include Carter 1987 and Geary 1992.

13 Braden 1985; Miola 1992.

14 Ranger 1991, 19–41.

the Tantalid dynasty (*Thy.* 650–664). Monstrous apparitions walk abroad by night (*Thy.* 668–73), and even by day the place gives off an uncanny *superstitio infernum* (“awe of the underworld,” *Thy.* 678). This contrasts with *Thyestes*’s other spatial extreme in which constellations crash apocalyptically into the frozen ocean. Seneca’s landscapes respond, as do those of the Gothic tradition, to the perils and rages of his protagonists.¹⁵ Interiors promise security but deliver menace and entrapment, located particularly by eighteenth-century Gothic within the aristocratic abodes of the powerful. Again via a Jacobean and Restoration lineage, the tyrannical dukes, counts, and cardinals who abuse their authority can trace their line of descent back to the decadent kings of the Senecan paradigm.¹⁶ Poison is served in golden cups, Hippolytus observes (*Phaed.* 518–19).

Finally, *dolor*—pain and suffering—is another crucial component of the Gothic: slow-spreading poison, dismemberment, murder, the burn of ambition or scourging of guilt; pain inflicted and expressed with a certain sadomasochistic zeal. Steven Bruhm notes the anxieties attendant on the theatricalization of suffering as “the stage [in the 1790s] had become the site of excessive violence, fevered emotion, and special effect,”¹⁷ straining for ever greater intensity of feeling predicated on the simulation of bodily pain. Senecan tragedy notoriously lingers to the point of revulsion on the individual body reduced to viscera and mutilated limbs, even if it never attains the point of satiation. *An ultra maius aut atrocius?* (“Is there anything greater or more atrocious?”) ask *Thyestes*’s chorus, hanging pruriently on the Messenger’s words. *Quid ultra potuit?* (“What more could he do?” 746–48). Unlike its Elizabethan and Jacobean cousins such as *Titus Andronicus* or *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, however, Senecan tragedy does not culminate in an all-out bloodbath. Rather, the trope of the isolated body in crisis joins terror, corruption, magniloquence, and madness to make Seneca a proto-Gothic dramatist.

Following Edmund Smith’s 1707 adaptation of Racine’s *Phèdre* into *Phaedra and Hippolytus*, in which the romantic lead Hippolytus survives his stepmother’s jealous plots to be reunited with the ingénue Ismena, Seneca disappeared almost entirely from the English repertoire. The reasons for this relative absence are several. An audience base increasingly dominated by middle-class consumers compelled commercial theaters to compile reliably popular seasons comprising remounted Shakespearean favorites, Restoration hits such as Otway’s *Venice Preserv’d*, romantic comedy, and tragedy fashionably

15 Rosenmeyer 1989.

16 E.g. *Phoen.* 654–64; *Phaed.* 204–15; *Oed.* 693–706; *Thy.* 204–18; *Ag.* 251–52, 269–72.

17 Bruhm 1994, 60.

transmuted into sentimental domestic drama.¹⁸ Ideally, it was agreed, one should identify and sympathize with the emotional predicaments of the characters onstage, a transaction facilitated by subduing tragic diction into more pedestrian prose dialogue, and transposing tragic personae into recognizable individuals whose dilemmas and traumas corresponded to those experienced in everyday life. Ancestral curses and the fate of kingdoms assumed less tragic stature than the consequences of marital infidelity or filial ingratitude.¹⁹ On an institutional level, the Stage Licensing Act of 1737 named Covent Garden and Drury Lane as the only two venues licensed to produce spoken drama (as opposed to puppetry, equestrian displays, opera, etc.).²⁰ All new works were now subject to approval by the Lord Chamberlain's Examiner of Plays, a tedious process with an uncertain outcome that made managements even more reluctant to deviate from an established repertoire that already included minimal Seneca.

Even adaptations which did draw perceptibly on Senecan tragedy, such as James Thomson's *Agamemnon* (1737), made extensive changes to appeal to mainstream tastes. Although modeled structurally on Seneca rather than Aeschylus—an unscrupulous Aegisthus overrides the conscience of a wavering Clytemnestra (Sen. *Ag.* 108–309), the ominous tapestries spread by Aeschylus's queen are omitted, Cassandra and a chorus of captives invoke the Trojan dead (Sen. *Ag.* 664–808), and Electra sees her brother Orestes safely into exile (Sen. *Ag.* 910–43)—Thomson's version also tames and dilutes its Senecan material. Instead of opening with the ghost of Thyestes brooding on his cursed descendants, the curtain rises on Clytemnestra herself seated “in a disconsolate posture” while an attendant attempts to mollify her tears, sighs, anxiety, and self-recrimination. As Edith Hall observes, Thomson's *Agamemnon* effected “the transformation of an ancient tragedy into an excellent example of the popular eighteenth-century genre of pathetic drama, dominated by a suffering, virtuous heroine, which went under the title ‘she-tragedy.’”²¹

David Mallet's *Eurydice* (1731) presents an alternative mode of Senecan retention. Largely a vehicle for celebrity actor-manager David Garrick to display his virtuosity in the role of Periander, “tossing from love to hate, from doubt to rage, to raving agony” (2.1), its lack of success resulted in part from the dominance of ‘rant’ over intimations of pathos.²² Bevis comments that it

18 Source: van Lennep et al. 1960–68.

19 Marsden 2008; de Ritter 1994.

20 Liesenfeld 1984.

21 Hall (2005), 71.

22 On the play's lack of success, see West 1991, 63.

displays “an almost Senecan stiffness,” calling the climactic scene “demented.”²³ The stiffness is a matter of opinion, but the Seneca unmistakable:

Come, ye sister Furies,
Daughters of hate and hell! arise, inflame
My murderous purpose; pour into my veins
Your gall, your scorpion-fellness, your keen horrors
That sting to madness; till my burning vengeance
Hath her full draught of blood—(3.1)

What turns this from Herculean rage into melodrama is Mallet’s application of the full Stygian panoply to an essentially domestic situation, the apparent infidelity of Periander’s wife. While Thomson smuggles romance into *Agamemnon* under the camouflage of antiquity, Mallet patches incongruous Senecan imagery into an otherwise sentimental work.

Richard Glover’s 1761 *Medea*, as Edith Hall has shown,²⁴ likewise dissolves a Senecan force of nature into the vapors of she-tragedy. Although purportedly a powerful sorceress who summons the goddess Hecate from Hades (3.7), Glover’s Medea is less concerned with revenge than with regaining Jason’s lost affections. Despite displaying her Senecan credentials in hyperbolic soliloquies, she has no real capacity for malice, and instead of responding to Jason’s betrayal by plotting to murder his new in-laws, this emolliated Medea “wrings her helpless hands” and swoons (3.3, 5.2). She kills her children not as a calculated act of retribution but in a fit of oblivious madness, an alteration read by Hall as compromising her tragic status but which is conceivably borrowed from another Senecan model, *Hercules furens*. Like Glover’s Medea, Hercules collapses unconscious after his infanticidal delirium and awakes to the horrific realization of what he has done (1323–29):

quis Tanais aut quis Nilus aut quis Persica
violentus unda Tigris aut Rhenus ferox
Tagusve Hibera turbidus gaza fluens
abluere dextram poterit? Arctoum licet
Maeotis in me gelida transfundat mare
et tota Tethys per meas currat manus,
harebit altum facinus.²⁵

23 Bevis 1988, 139.

24 Hall 2000.

25 “What Tanais or what Nile, what Persian Tigris / violent in its waves, ferocious Rhine, / or Hiberian Tagus flowing thick with treasure / could wash my right hand clean? The Arctic /

Refracted through *Macbeth* 2.2.75–78 and 5.1.39–59, this cry becomes that of Glover's Medea (5.2):

Not all the disburden'd sluices of the skies
 The wat'ry Nereids with the Ocean's store
 Nor all the tears which misery hath shed
 Can from the mother wash her children's blood.

Glover thus successfully splices a Senecan tag already well-known to English audiences into his construction of a sympathetic Senecan heroine.

The transition from she-tragedy to Gothic melodrama is illustrated by Arthur Murphy's *The Grecian Daughter* (1772), a piece of ostensible classicizing, although, as Evans observes, it would not seem incongruous "if suddenly the turret of a Gothic castle or convent protruded above the trees of ancient Syracuse."²⁶ Murphy's heroine Euphrasia, played from 1782 onwards by "Muse of Tragedy" Sarah Siddons herself,²⁷ rescues her elderly father Evander, rightful king of Syracuse, from the "dungeon drear, / Cell within cell, a labyrinth of horror" (1.1) where he is being starved to death by the tyrant Dionysius. The Gothic atmosphere is exacerbated, as in Seneca's *Thyestes* and *Oedipus*, by ominous portents: "Some dread event is lab'ring into birth. / At close of day the sullen sky held forth / Unerring signals. With disastrous glare / The moon's full orb rose crimson'd o'er with blood" (2.1).²⁸ Euphrasia, otherwise a model of tender virtue, scales tremendous rhetorical heights as she vows to avenge her father's suffering (1.1):

Blood is his due, Melanthon; yes, the blood,
 The vile, black blood that fills the tyrant's veins
 Would graceful look upon my dagger's point.
 Come, vengeance, come, shake off this feeble sex,
 Sinew my arm, and guide it to his heart.

Maeotis could drench me in its freezing sea, / and all Tethys run through my hands, / and still this fathomless crime would stick."

26 Evans 1947, 41.

27 Ranger 1991, 95–98.

28 Compare Jephson's *The Count of Narbonne* (1781, adapted from Walpole's seminal novel *The Castle of Otranto*): "Spectres glide, / gibbering and pointing as we pass along, / while the deep earth's unorganized caves / send forth wild sounds, and clamours terrible; / These towers shake round us, though the untroubled air / stagnates to lethargy." For the image of a monstrous pregnancy, cf. *Phaedra* 1019–20: *nescioquid onerato sinu gravis unda portat*.

And thou, O filial piety that rul'st
 My woman's breast, turn to vindictive rage.
 [...]
 Shall not he tremble, when a daughter comes,
 Wild with her griefs, and terrible with wrongs,
 Fierce in despair, all nature in her cause,
 Arm'd and rous'd to vengeance?—Yes, Melanthon,
 The man of blood shall hear me; yes, my voice
 Shall mount aloft upon the whirlwind's wing,
 Pierce yon blue vault, and bring the thund'rer down (1.1).

The self-address, the call for vengeance and furious rage, the alliance of universal nature and thundering gods all draw on Senecan tragic diction, rather than Attic Greek.

Euphrasia alleviates her father's starvation by suckling him on her own breast-milk.²⁹ Despite the pains taken by Murphy to drown it in pathos, this queer exchange of bodily fluids performs an inversion of familial roles as decisive as any Oedipal scenario. "The father finds a parent in his child," babbles Evander, as though this method of nurture were entirely natural. "All her laws inverted quite, great Nature triumphs still," comments one of the overcome guards (cf. *Oed.* 371, *Natura versa est*, "Nature has been inverted"). Evander, having ignominiously lost his kingdom, is determined to end his life until Euphrasia offers herself as a "refuge" for his aged body with overtones of Antigone's devotion in Seneca's *Phoenissae*. "The blood but loiters in these frozen veins," Evander protests; like Oedipus, he feels he has already perished and is dragging out borrowed time as a "mould'ring corpse," but Euphrasia's "virtue," like Antigone's, convinces him to go on.

Euphrasia's infatilization of her father suggests another Senecan connection when she conceals the old man in her mother's tomb for his protection, as Andromache conceals her son Astyanax. Dionysius, fuming that he cannot wipe out the line of descent because Euphrasia's own infant son has been sent away to safety, confronts Euphrasia before the tomb with the ostensible fact of her father's death in prison. Euphrasia, knowing perfectly well where Evander is hidden, must dissemble convincing grief; but unlike Andromache, she successfully douses the tyrant's suspicions with a torrent of moral rectitude: he will not have the satisfaction of her tears, and she appeals instead for divine

29 A popular Renaissance image, this so-called "*Caritas Romana*" is first mentioned in Valerius Maximus 5.4.7 and appears in extant Pompeian frescoes. In Valerius, as in later art, the act is treated as one of exemplary piety.

compassion on his wicked soul. As in *Troades*, much play is made of the paradox that a living person, supposed already dead, resides in an ancestral tomb.³⁰

The Castle Spectre (1797) by Matthew Lewis, author of the notorious (later classic) novel *The Monk*, became the most long-running and frequently-revived Gothic melodrama.³¹ Its quasi-Oedipal back-story, in which the murder of Earl Osmond's brother on the road is attributed to brigands until the fratricidal truth is revealed, culminates in Osmond's attempt to force incestuous marriage upon his niece Angela. Angela's identity is proven by the scar left on her throat by Osmond's dagger when he left her for dead as an infant by the body of her father. Brought up in pastoral ignorance of her heritage, she is returned to the Castle as Osmond's prospective bride, but finds its "gilded pomp and greatness" oppressive in comparison to the simple woodland banks "on which I rested when fatigued" and "the wild tangled wood which supplied me with strawberries" (cf. *Phaed.* 510–17). Osmond's desire is not for Angela herself so much as for the deceased Evelina whose revival in her daughter's features, like that of Seneca's Theseus in the young and virtuous Hippolytus, fuels Osmond's incestuous passion like that of Phaedra (*Phaed.* 646–58).

Osmond's manner of speech periodically aligns him with another Senecan heroine, Medea: "Rather than resign her," he vows, "my own hand shall give this castle a prey to flames: then plunging with Angela into the blazing gulph, I'll leave this ruins to tell posterity how desperate was my love, and how dreadful my revenge!—" (3.2). Although somewhat short of Medea's threat of universal cataclysm, Osmond's transformation of his equivalently all-encompassing domain, the Castle, to a "blazing gulph" into which he shall drag his enemies to be consumed echoes the sentiment behind Medea's *mecum omnia abeant. Trahere, cum pereas, libet* (*Med.* 428).³² Later, it transpires that Angela's father survived Osmond's original attack but has been imprisoned beneath the palace, another dark family secret, buried deep in its labyrinthine entrails. About to finish him off, Osmond recoils from a sudden vision both retrospective and prophetic: "Ha! Why roll these seas of blood before me? Whose mangled corse do they bear to my feet?—Fratricide?—Oh! 'tis a dreadful name . . ." (cf. *Med.*

30 Kosofsky Sedgwick 1986, 9 argues that "subterranean spaces and live burial" are fundamental Gothic tropes.

31 Evans 1947, 133; Cox 1992, 39–41.

32 "Let all be swept away with me. It's pleasant to drag everything down as you perish." Compare the similar reduction performed by Thomson's Clytemnestra (5.1): "Perish all! Perish my self, Egisthus, Agamemnon! So this proud rival this Cassandra perish!"

958–64);³³ but he concludes that, driven by Fate, his surrender to violent crime is unavoidable.³⁴

The return of the dead plays a significant role in Lewis's drama. The specter of Evelina, Angela's mother, may be benevolent, but in her reincarnation as Angela herself she embodies the vengeance long overdue to Osmond. Osmond's nightmare, recounted in 4.1, glosses this substitution. Dreaming that he embraces Angela, Osmond finds to his horror the woman in his arms transforming into Evelina, first drenched in blood as when he stabbed her, then withering into "a skeleton, loathsome and meagre, [who] clasped me in her mouldering arms!" It is Angela, fashioned in her mother's image, who consummates her mother's revenge. Lewis' Epilogue, spoken by 'Angela' (Dorothy Jordan), brings back this theme of infinite return:

Now as for Osmond—at that villain's name
I feel reviving wrath my soul inflame!
And shall one short and sudden pang suffice
To clear so base a fault, so gross a vice?
No! To your bar, dear friends, for aid I fly!
Bid Osmond live again, again to die;
Nightly with plaudits loud his breath recall,
Nightly beneath my dagger see him fall,
Give him a thousand lives!—and let me take them all.

As in a shattered mirror, a thousand daggers sink repeatedly into a thousand villains, an action replicated again and again by popular demand. Death is never complete, because the corpse simply dusts himself off and takes a bow, ready to recycle himself back through the endless, self-perpetuating loop of redress and recall. This, too, shares a Senecan impulse in its obsessive replaying of traumatic past incidents, desperately, compulsively, insatiably.

Gothic villains such as Mortimer in Francis North's *The Kentish Barons* (1791) offered plenty of scope for Senecan tirades. Fraternal discord over a wife's betrayal, arising from a pre-existing ancestral "doom" and destined to detonate amid the innocent offspring of the blighted house is a Thyestean plot; North's Mortimer channels Atreus throughout. His persecution of the innocent Elina is

33 See also the use of this trope in Boaden's *The Secret Tribunal* (1795): "Hah! What sea of blood rises before me! / While through the crimson waves a phantom glides / in threat'ning horror—Lo, it is my sister! / O shield me, Ulric, from her frown! hide, hide me!"

34 Lewis is at pains to point out for the benefit of the censor that he does not personally condone Osmond's attitude.

motivated partly by lust but largely by the “brighter, grander passion” of revenge on Elina’s now-deceased father: “While there’s one branch of that accursed tree / Alive and flourishing,” Mortimer confides to his unwilling *satelles*, “my restless spirit / Shall, like a mildew, kill the wholesome blossom” (3.1). Although not brothers by blood, the two young men had been sworn companions until “the Fates, which doomed our houses ever to be foes” brought them into conflict over the woman who later became Elina’s mother. Feigning acquiescence, Mortimer has cultivated his smoldering resentment until he is now in a position to exact “tenfold vengeance” on the next generation. He feels driven by forces beyond his control, exclaiming, “Where does my passion drive me! [...] that my fortune / Should urge me on to such a deed as this?” (1.3). Compare, for example, *Thyestes* 260–62: “A tumult of frenzy is shaking my breast, and churning it deep within. I am swept along, and know not where, but I am swept along.”³⁵ Mortimer, on the very point of attaining the “summit” of his ambition, his soul about to be “glutted with the luxury / It has so long been thirsting for, Revenge,”³⁶ nevertheless attains no satisfaction in the prospect, instead stalking the nocturnal apartments of his castle urging himself—like Clytemnestra, like Medea—not to lose momentum at this critical moment: “And dost thou, foolish heart, / Dost thou then faint, so near thy journey’s end? / No, thou shalt on, tho’ all thy strings should crack” (3.1; compare *Thy.* 890; *Med.* 987; *Ag.* 114). Unlike his Senecan antecedents, Mortimer will be thwarted, but his burning, doomed commitment to Senecan revenge has carried the action to its final breath.

Seneca persists in the turns of phrase employed by Gothic villains even as they become Byronic heroes. Traces remain, for example, in Charles Maturin’s *Bertram, or the Castle of St Aldobrand* (1816), a drama of doomed adulterous romance plotted along lines that anticipate *Wuthering Heights*. Tiny shards of Seneca glint in the gloom; saved from shipwreck, Bertram (played of course by Edmund Kean) begs his rescuers to cast him back into the sea to drown. “Why dost thou then despond?” the Prior inquires. When Bertram answers him, “Because I live—” (1.3), we hear the echo, faint but clear, of Seneca’s Phaedra (879–880): “THESEUS: Let me know the offence that needs to be punished by death / PHAEDRA: The fact that I live.”³⁷ The terms in which Bertram condemns himself to perish in the wilderness resemble those used by *Phoenissae*’s

35 Trans. Fitch 2004. *tumultus pectora attonitus quatit / penitusque volvit; raptor et quo nescio, / sed raptor.*

36 Cf. *Thy.* 885–90: *Aequalis astris gradior [...] bene est, abunde est iam sat est etiam mihi.*

37 Trans. Fitch 2004. THESEUS: *Quod sit luendum morte delictum indica?* / PHAEDRA: *Quod vivo.*

Oedipus, who wishes to bury himself in the dense forests and deep caves of haunted Cithaeron, his destined grave from birth,³⁸ far from the detested sound of human speech that reminds him of his crimes (223–29). “Is there no forest / Whose shades are dark enough to shelter us?” asks Bertram, “Or cavern rifted by the perilous lightning / [...]—there let us bide, / Nor hear the voice of man, nor call of heaven” (3.2).³⁹

Maturin, unlike most Gothic dramatists, makes use of the formal rhythms and rhetorical cadences of Senecan speech, such as aphoristic stichomythia: “IMOGINE: By heaven and all its host, he shall not perish. / BERTRAM: By hell and all its host, he shall not live” (4.2). Verbal and phonemic repetition, characteristic particularly of Imogine’s speech-patterns as she begins to slip into terminal insanity, create an incantatory effect that makes each successive phrase another shockwave rippling out from the epicenter of her pain, circling back to the same unbearable point rather than seeking to advance or change direction:

Oh! that a mountain’s weight were cast on me;
 Oh! that the wide, wild ocean heaved o’er me;
 Oh! that I could into the earthy centre
 Sink and be nothing (4.2).⁴⁰

All individually tenuous, these connections accumulate throughout the play, making Senecan tragedy pertinent as a stylistic resource, although not necessarily functional as an activated intertext. Finally, the devastation Bertram feels upon murdering Aldobrand, pursuit of whom has consumed his life, has something of the simultaneous compression and enormity underlying *Thyestes*’s apocalyptic ‘zodiac ode’: “I deemed that when I struck the final blow,” Bertram relates, “Mankind expired, and we were left together, / The only tenants of a blasted world” (5.2). For Bertram, the world has perished with his victim. *Vitae est avidus quisquis non vult / mundo secum pereunte mori*, advises *Thyestes*’s

38 *Nemo me ex his eruet silvis: latebo rupis exesae cavo / aut saepe densa corpus abstrusum tegam*, *Phoen.* 358–60; cf. 67–73 & 115–17.

39 Cf. Boaden’s *Fountainville Forest* (1794): “Hence, Monster, hence, nor blot the beauteous day. / Hail, cavern’d glooms, to your deep shade I fly, / Darkness myself, to give you living horror.”

40 Cf. *Oed* 868 f., *Dehisce tellus*, etc; also *Phaed.* 1238 & *Thy.* 1006–09. Also compare Manuel in Greatheed’s *The Regent* (1788), played by Kemble: “Burst! cleave, ye vaults! Hail ruin upon all! / Sunder the earth and yawn to swallow us! / Thou ghostly devastation burst thy chains, / Breathe pestilence and bellow shiv’ring thunders. / I’m lost . . .”

chorus: "a glutton for life is one that is loath / to die when the whole world perishes with him" (*Thy.* 883–84).⁴¹

Joanna Baillie's *Plays on the Passions* includes several tragedies with Gothic affiliations. In concentrating on exhibiting and arousing intense emotions, rather than plot construction or psychological verisimilitude, Baillie's strategies as a dramatist resemble Seneca's. Her protagonists are plunged into extreme situations to which they respond with overwrought soliloquy, creating representational vortices that draw their auditors into an apparently inescapable worldview imposed by a motivating 'passion,' warping the contours of the social reality other characters struggle to maintain. The most successful of Baillie's tragedies, *De Monfort* (1798) was staged twice at Drury Lane, originally with acclaimed classical actor John Philip Kemble in the title role, and then in an 1821 revival starring the devilish Edmund Kean.⁴² *De Monfort* explores the passion of hatred, tracing the progressive disintegration of the protagonist's mind under the pressure of an irrational, corrosive enmity.

De Monfort expresses his aversion to the "fiend" and "serpent" Rezenvelt in exaggerated language that employs a Senecan vocabulary of plague, poison, corruption, flames, and torture. Its intensity mirrors eroticism: "In my breast a raging passion burns," De Monfort confides to his sister Jane, "a passion which hath made my nightly couch / A place of torment" (2.2). He believes his hatred to have reached its apex, but when the false report reaches him that Jane has formed a romantic attachment to Rezenvelt, his anguish bursts its bounds like a foaming river "with swelling floods surcharg'd": "Midst all the curs'd thoughts / That on my soul like stinging scorpions prey'd / This never came before—" De Monfort writhes. "I should have thought of heav'n and hell conjoined, / The morning star mix'd with infernal fire / Ere I had thought of this—" (3.3). Baillie's *adynata*, applying images drawn from the furthest reaches of the natural world to human sensations that otherwise seem to outstrip expression, are a distinctly Senecan mannerism, along with the conscious awareness of an unhealthy compulsion manifesting as pain that goads the subject, despite himself, to violent action.⁴³ "Detested of my soul!" de Monfort cries. "I will have vengeance! . . . I'll do a deed of blood—Why shrink I thus?" He hurls his dagger at the wall. "Fy, this recoiling nature! / O that his sever'd limbs were strew'd in air . . ." (3.3).

Pushed to breaking point, de Monfort stalks his victim through a midnight landscape made terrible by the force of his own blighted imagination:

41 Trans. Fitch 2004.

42 On Kean's style of acting see Ranger 1991, 94; Thomson 2000, 115–24.

43 Cf. Gill 1997 on Medea's conscious surrender to passion.

Deep settled shadows rest across the path,
 And thickly-tangled boughs o'erhang this spot.
 O, that a tenfold gloom did cover it!
 That midst the murky darkness I might strike;
 As in the wild confusion of a dream,
 Things horrid, bloody, terrible, do pass,
 As tho' they pass'd not; nor impress the mind
 With the fix'd clearness of reality (4.1).

He hears, he informs us, the earth groan hollowly under his feet, the screech-owl portending untold horrors, the river's "dismal wailing" in the distance, and dead leaves passing secrets as they rustle; the wind is rising and a bank of storm-clouds gathering above. That Rezenvelt is oblivious to the menace of the scene he enters shows its Gothic frightfulness to be a product of De Monfort's mental state, but for an audience privy to foreknowledge of his imminent murder, Rezenvelt's imperviousness to Nature's complicity seems ironic and obtuse.

Delineating the passion of fear in *Orra*, Baillie's virtuous but ultimately unstable heroine is imprisoned in a supposedly haunted castle to coerce her into accepting an unwanted marriage. Orra, who relishes the pleasurable chills that accompany ghost stories, is so susceptible to the castle's "dismal" and "ghastly" atmosphere that she eventually becomes unable to distinguish between visions and materiality, or human and supernatural agency, ending the play in a state of apparent delusion as the only one able to perceive the omnipresence of mortality, a kind of hysterical Cassandra announcing inevitable doom to her uncomprehending rescue party. She speaks in Senecan tongues amid the more rational, domestic, or romantic discourse preferred by those around her.

"There is a joy in fear," Orra initially maintains, "when the cold blood shoots through every vein: / When every hair's-pit on my shrunken skin / A knot-
 ted knoll becomes" (2.1). Seneca similarly anatomizes the fear response, his characters verbally articulating their internal sensations (e.g. *Thy.* 634–35; *Oed.* 206–07; *Med.* 926–27; *Troad.* 623–24).⁴⁴ Orra's Gothic body displays an uncanny responsive agency of its own, which later begins to erode the distinction between living and dead flesh: "Thy shrunk and sharpened features / Are of the cor[p]se's colour," her companion Catherine exclaims, refusing to

44 See also e.g. *Ag.* 131–38 (Clytemnestra's turmoil); *Thy.* 947–51 (Thyestes's proleptic grief); *Thy.* 999–1000 & 1041–42 (Thyestes's nausea); *Phaed.* 640–44 (Phaedra's lust); and the pseudo-Senecan *H.O.* 1218–32 (Hercules's pain).

continue with the tale which has so drained Orra's blood. Orra elaborates: "A fearful kindredship there is between / The living and the dead: an awful bond: / Woe's me! That we do shudder at ourselves /—At that which we must be!" (4.3). This *memento mori* explicitness derives somewhat less from Seneca than from morbid Jacobean meditations on the transience of life and the deceptive tissue of appearances (e.g. *Duchess of Malfi* 2.1.42–58; *Revenger's Tragedy* 3.5.68–99). Nevertheless, the thematic current of bodily form on the verge of catastrophic dissolution runs strongly through Seneca, attaining its fullest expression in *Phaedra*. Hippolytus's youthful beauty, his irresistible *forma*, is commended throughout the play, accompanied by intimations of its vulnerability (e.g. 761–823). The horrific closing scene in which Theseus must reassemble the unrecognizable fragments of his son's corpse emphasizes both the inseparability of the self from the body and the inseparability of the body from its condition as unformed matter (*forma carens*, 1265).

Orra's finale stages a similar conclusion, albeit under the euphemizing veil of "madness" which lends both license and incredibility to the heroine's babbled insights. She regards her rescuers with "a terrible smile of recognition," but her anagnorisis, rather than returning her to a prosaic daytime state of mind, has opened her eyes instead to their inherent insubstantiality. "Your faces waver to and fro; / I'll know you better in your winding sheets," she tells them, and again insists that "The living and the dead together are / in horrid neighbourhood—'tis but thin vapour, / Floating round thee, makes the wav'ring bound" (5.2). Having permeated this membrane, Orra alone now witnesses a swarm of skeletal and rotted ghosts rising from the subterranean depths to menace her with their eyeless skulls and incomprehensible parody of human language ("lipless jaws that move and clatter round us / In mockery of speech," 5.2). Although descended from a murderer (2.1), Orra's visions are prompted not by guilt but by sheer terror, a terror with the power to make verbally and hence theatrically manifest the very objects of its aversion. Unlike, for example, Lewis's "Castle Spectre," *Orra's* skeletons are not made mechanically, literally visible onstage; and yet, like Seneca's bravura invocations of the underworld (*Oed.* 530–638; *H.F.* 662–827; *Ag.* 741–74), they raise the unquiet dead to haunt the audience's primed imagination.

Unspeakable crimes and unspoken secrets form another Senecan strand in Gothic drama,⁴⁵ particularly when the crime at the core of a character's

45 Kosofsky Sedgwick 1986, 14: "The unspeakable appears on every page: 'unutterable horror': 'unspeakable' or 'unutterable' are the intensifying adjectives of choice in these novels." Sedgwick (39) relates this to Burke's "sublime of privation": the *unseen*, *unnamable*, *unfathomable*.

centripetal course is incest. While Oedipus and Phaedra are better known for their more respectable Greek heritage, Senecan elements nevertheless stand out in the Gothic treatment of this theme. A typical Senecan strategy for conveying the magnitude of evil, terror, or chaos is to place events and sensations outside language, either by reiterating the *nefas*—the absolute taboo—of, for example, cannibalism (*Thyestes*), or of bestiality (*Phaedra*), or of incest (*Oedipus*); or by concealing the specificity of an incipient horror behind a foundering *nescioquid* (a formless unknown, a Something).⁴⁶ Despite the lavish expenditure of poetic discourse, some referents, it is implied, remain unobtainable.

They certainly remained unrepresentable, at least on the eighteenth-century stage. As Walpole wrote in his postscript to *The Mysterious Mother* (1768):

From the time that I first undertook the foregoing scenes, I never flattered myself that they would be proper to appear on the stage. The subject is so horrid, that I thought it would shock, rather than give satisfaction to an audience . . . The subject is more truly horrid than that of Oedipus.⁴⁷

Walpole's text was circulated privately but was not actually published until 1791. Until its climactic dénouement, the Countess's transgression remains indeed mysterious, its contours only obliquely suggested by her son's banishment and the depth of her penance. She has committed, she warns her young ward Adeliza, "a crime past thy conceiving" (4.1.256), but is incapable of disclosing the "unheard-of sins" which are haunting her to distraction.⁴⁸ By keeping the truth unspoken, buried beneath her silence, she hopes (like Lee's Jocasta or Racine's Phèdre) to avert the catastrophe incubated by this very suppression. When Edmund returns from exile, she recognises in him not her banished son but his dead father, and faints; Edmund attempts to revive her, entreating her to "Look up, my very dear, behold thy son! / It is thy Edmund's voice." The rhythm, the tableau, and the substitution of identity combine to recall Phaedra's faint and recovery in Hippolytus's arms: *attolle vultus . . . / tuus*

46 Instances of *nefas*: *Oed.* 15, 246, 274, 398, 1031; *Ag.* 30, 124; *Thy.* 28, 194, 265, 624, 689, 1006; *HF.* 500, 603, 1004; *Tro.* 48, 678, 1086; *Phoen.* 80, 223, 300; *Med.* 122, 261, 931; *Phaed.* 115, 127–28, 130, 143, 153, 160. *Nescioquid* is used more selectively, but with greater force: *Phaed.* 858 & 1019; *Med.* 917; *H.F.* 1146–47; *Oed.* 334 & 925; *Thy.* 267.

47 Cited in Evans 1947, 33. The *Oedipus* Walpole has in mind may be that of Dryden and Lee, rather than Sophocles; see Macintosh 2009, 62 and 118 n.48 on the translation's popularity and subsequent "fall from favour."

48 3.1.28, "unheard-of sins"; 4.1.256, "a crime past thy conceiving"; 4.1.267, "unheard-of crimes"; 5.1.158, "unheard-of crimes"; 5.1.288, "strange crimes."

en, alumna, temet Hippolytus tenet ("Raise your head . . . / See, child, your own Hippolytus is holding you," *Phaed.* 587–88).⁴⁹

Attempting to send Adeliza out of danger, the Countess unwittingly facilitates the young woman's marriage to Edmund. When this is revealed, she responds with an outburst of Senecan proportions (5.1.291–311):

Confusion! Frenzy! Blast me, all ye furies!
 Edmund and Adeliza! when! where! how!
 Edmund wed Adeliza! quick, unsay
 The monstrous tale—oh! prodigy of ruin!
 Does my own son then boil with fiercer fires
 Than scorched his impious mother's madding veins!
 [...]
 Did I not couple
 Distinctions horrible? plan unnatural rites
 To grace my funeral pile, and meet the furies
 More innocent than those I leave behind me!
 [...]
 Globe of the world,
 If thy frame split not with such crimes as these,
 It is immortal!

The plea to be struck down, the imprecation to the Furies, and the conviction that the firmament should shatter under the impact of such transgression all have Senecan precedent (*Thyestes*, *Hercules furens*, *Phaedra*), as do the *scelera* that increase with each generation (*Thyestes*, *Phoenissae*, *Agamemnon*). Scorched veins, monstrosity, ruin, and "unnatural rites" also draw on the Senecan lexicon of horror. It transpires that Adeliza was the progeny of an incestuous union between the Countess and Edmund, and is therefore not only his sister but also his daughter. The improbability of the compound error—Edmund believed he had seduced a lady-in-waiting, and the Countess, temporarily deranged by grief at her husband's death, "saw thee / thy father's image" (5.1.368–69)—does not detract from the sensationalism of her exposure. Walpole, although advised to mitigate the Countess's guilt by leaving her ignorant of Edmund's identity until after the fact,⁵⁰ instead makes her fully aware of her own monstrosity, and in doing so aligns her cognizant but

49 Trans. Fitch 2004.

50 Clery 2001.

helpless erotic culpability with that of Phaedra: *furor cogit sequi peiora* (*Phaed.* 178–79).⁵¹

Among the Romantic lyric dramas, Percy Shelley's *The Cenci* stands out as a work intended not for private reading but for public performance.⁵² Compared with Byron's *Manfred* (1816), a more orthodox closet drama likewise concerned with the tragic aftermath of sexual transgression, *The Cenci's* treatment of its subject is far darker and more extreme. Although tormented by the suicide of his beloved sister Astarte, Manfred never intended to cause her harm (2.2.117–19). Their liaison was apparently consensual, and occurred well before the commencement of the dramatic action; moreover, the precise nature of Manfred's "half-maddening sin" is never fully named, remaining a matter of circumstantial speculation and suspicion both inside and outside the text. At the point of disclosure, Byron imposes a strategic ellipsis over "the lady Astarte, his . . ." (3.3.47). Shelley, on the other hand, makes Count Cenci's rape of his daughter the centerpiece of a gruesome revenge tragedy whose fascination with exquisite pain and post-traumatic moral degradation is reminiscent of *Titus Andronicus*. Insisting that the play was "expressly written for theatrical exhibition," Shelley instructed his business manager that it was "fitted only for Covent Garden," and he was "very unwilling that anyone but [Edmund] Kean" should play the role of Count Cenci.⁵³ Covent Garden refused on the grounds of Shelley's subject matter, which was condemned in reviews of the subsequently published text as "abhorrent to feelings of the general standard."⁵⁴

A number of individual lines in *The Cenci* possess Senecan resonance,⁵⁵ but Shelley's most sustained development of a trope both Senecan and Gothic involves this characteristic dynamic of occlusion and disclosure. Although continuing to experiment with verbal overdrive, Shelley accompanies this technique with an explicitly stated frustration over its inherent insufficiency. The trauma which Beatrice has suffered is either evaded by means of ellipses;

51 "Furor forces me to follow the worst way." Ovid's Medea (*Met.* 7.20–21), *video meliora proboque, / deteriora sequor* may be behind this. On conscious transgression in Senecan characterisation, see Gill 1997.

52 Simpson 1998 analyses closet drama as a politically motivated circumvention of censorship.

53 Letter 23 to Thomas Peacock dated July 1819, in Brett-Smith 1909, 194; the statement about "theatrical exhibition" is quoted in Strand & Zimmermann 1996, 261.

54 Contemporary review in *The London Magazine*, quoted in White 1966, 188.

55 E.g. a *locus horridus* (3.1.260–65), descriptions of pain (2.1.64–71; 3.1.44–48), a superhuman villain (4.1.183–89), the intensification of revenge (3.1.87–89), and Beatrice's welcome to death (5.4.115–17). For more detailed discussion, see Slaney 2015.

conveyed as a speechless gap; or embedded in layers of metaphor, conveyed as a medley of disorienting sensory analogues.⁵⁶ Beatrice, “whose thought / Is like a ghost, shrouded and folded up / In its own formless horror,” can no longer identify her own person (3.1.74–75) or express the “expressionless” (3.1.214). “Of all words / That minister to mortal intercourse,” she wants to know, “which wouldst thou hear? For there is none to tell / My misery” (3.1.111–14). The inadequacy of language, implicit in Senecan dramaturgy, becomes for Shelley a prominent, reflexively articulated theme.

Language may not have the power to adequately describe an existing world, but it does have the power to fabricate new ones. Gothic melodrama employs this linguistic potency in its rhetorical, psychoactive, transformative manifestation as theatrical speech. While not taken wholesale onto the eighteenth-century stage, Senecan tragedy nevertheless persisted, seeping into the highly-strung discourse of Gothic melodrama and bubbling up at moments of particular intensity when playwrights were compelled to reach for a register of speech appropriate to crisis. The Gothic leitmotifs of tyranny, haunting, vengeance, and delusion retained a Senecan stamp in the manner of their expression. Unacknowledged and unidentified, a dark substratum of Senecan tragedy continued to nourish Gothic drama, uncannily present in certain passing lights like long-dead features returned in the face of the living.

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56 Examples of such ellipsis: 1.1.102, 1.2.37, 2.1.56; 3.1.50, 3.1.56. On metaphor and language in *The Cenci*, see Peterfreund 1991; Worton 1982.

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Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Receptions of Seneca *Tragicus*

Francesco Citti

1 Introduction

The negative judgment of authors like Schiller, Lessing and Schlegel greatly affected Seneca's influence on nineteenth-century theater. However, significant examples of his influence are still evident. On one hand, the strong passion and family conflicts that characterize Senecan characters often emerge in the violent dramas of Shelley and Heinrich von Kleist. On the other hand, Senecan elements come together in some rewritings of his tragedies, in particular of *Oedipus* (as in the case of the neoclassical Martínez de la Rosa); *Medea* (sorceress and solitary heroine in Franz Grillparzer); and *Phaedra* (anti-puritan heroine in Swinburne, Titanic in Gabriele D'Annunzio, and Christian in Miguel de Unamuno). From the 1920s, in postwar Europe, mainly thanks to T. S. Eliot and Antonin Artaud, Seneca's theater was favorably reappraised, imitated, translated, and finally brought back on stage with experimentations that often emphasize its characteristics as a theater of passions and words.

2 Seneca's Dramas and His Detractors

Opinions about Seneca and the classical theater that he inspired were largely negative as early as the eighteenth century. For example, Johann Christoph Friedrich Schiller (in his first introduction to the tragedy *The Robbers*, *Die Räuber*, 1782), criticizes characters in the French theater by branding them as 'Senecan': "ice-cold observers of their own rage or pompous professors of their own passion." Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, in his early essay *On the Latin tragedies which go under Seneca's name* (*Von den lateinischen Trauerspielen, welche unter dem Namen des Seneca bekannt sind*, 1754), had alternating appreciation for their "strong descriptions of passions," able to engage and impassion the readers, and criticism for their excessive rhetoric and artificiality.¹ This

1 Cf. Regenbogen 1961, 410 f.; Bonfatti 2001, 73–76.

condemnation becomes stronger in the *Laocoon* (1766), where he asserts that the characters of tragedy must “manifest their feelings, give expression to their pains, and give full play to their natural emotion.” However, “the moment they appear to act under the influence of constraint and rule, they lose at once the power of touching our sensibilities, and bare admiration is all that we can award to the Stoic gladiator of the sock.” He concludes in a polemical mood: “such is the title which may with propriety be given to all the personages of what are called the tragedies of Seneca.” It was not only the public that was susceptible to these artificialities; indeed, “the best tragic genius, accustomed to these artificial death-scenes, could not avoid being betrayed into bombast and rodomontade.”²

Even more severe was the criticism by August Wilhelm Schlegel, who, in his *Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Litteratur* (*A course of Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*, 1809), doubted that works of such poor taste could actually be attributed to Seneca:

Whatever period may have given birth to the tragedies of Seneca, they are beyond description bombastic and frigid, unnaturally both in character and action, revolting from their violation of propriety, and so destitute of theatrical effect, that I believe they were never meant to leave the rhetorical schools for the stage.³

For Schlegel, too, rhetoric prevails over character and content: “All is phrase [...]. A total poverty of sentiment is dressed out with wit and acuteness.”⁴ These observations had a powerful impact on the critical debate, where the predominating idea was that such dramas were not intended for the stage: they were static, pedantic, rhetorical, and altogether too violent.⁵

² Lessing 1836, 51.

³ “Aus welcher Zeit die Tragödien des Seneca nun auch seyn mögen, sie sind über alle Beschreibung schwülstig und frostig, ohne Natur in Charakter und Handlung, durch die widersinnigsten Unschicklichkeiten empörend, und so von aller theatralischen Einsicht entblößt, daß ich glaube, sie waren nie dazu bestimmt, aus den Schulen der Rhetoren auf die Bühne hervorzutreten.”

⁴ Schlegel 1846, 210; on Schlegel, and the Senecan reception in Shelley and von Kleist, see Slaney, 2015, from which I draw relevant comparisons.

⁵ Cf. Boissier 1861 (an essay significantly entitled *Les tragédies de Sénèque ont-elles été représentées?*); Leo 1878 (famous is his chapter “De tragoedia rhetorica,” 147–59). A survey of criticism on Seneca, in Seidentsticker—Armstrong 1985, esp. 917–21; see also Fitch 2000 on the debate on Seneca’s performability.

3 Power and Passion: Senecan Characters in Shelley and Kleist

Due to this severe criticism, the reception of Seneca's drama in this period is rather uneven and inconsistent; however, we can discern its most significant aspects and trends. In some cases, there may be a more or less direct influence from the atmosphere or the characters of Senecan tragedy: his lonely and bloodthirsty tyrants were brought back to life (like Thyestes and Atreus: "passionate, treacherous, exorbitant,"⁶ sublime architects and inspired creators⁷ of evil never before attempted by men, real works of art, scary even for the gods);⁸ and his black and passionate heroines (like Medea, "architectress of wicked crimes," 266, triumphant after discovering a *haut usitatum*, "unexperimented" vengeance with the sacrifice of children, 899). For instance, Count Francesco Cenci, protagonist of Percy Bysshe Shelley's drama *The Cenci* (1819), was inspired both by Senecan tyrants and by the Shakespearean villain, while the incestuous violence inflicted on the daughter Beatrice recalls situations from Seneca's *Oedipus* and *Phaedra*.⁹ There also are explicit references to the *Thyestes*. When Count Cenci celebrates the news of the death of his children by drinking a "goblet of Greek wine," Shelley evokes the passage in which Atreus hopes that his brother Thyestes will drink the blood of his children (*mixtum suorum sanguinem genitor bibat*, "Let the father drink the blended blood of his sons," 917). In the case of Shelley's drama, it is the father himself who imagines that he drinks not wine, but the blood of his own children: "As if thou wert indeed my children's blood / Which I did thirst to drink! The charm works well; / It must be done; it shall be done, I swear!" (1.3.197–99). Furthermore, the attitude of Beatrice as she summons death in the last act ("Come, obscure Death, / and wind me in thine all-embracing arms!" 5.4.115–16), seems to echo Phaedra's invocation of death, at the end of Seneca's tragedy (*O mors amoris una sedamen mali, / o mors pudoris maximum laesi decus, / confugimus ad te: pande placatos sinus*, "O death, sole relief from evil love, o death, greatest glory for blighted honour, I flee to you: open wide your merciful arms," 1188–90).

6 Miola 1992, 23; on "Senecan Tyranny" in Shakespeare, see esp. 68–121.

7 On Seneca and the rhetoric of the sublime, see Mazzoli 1990, Torre 2003 (with bibliography) and Gunderson 2015 (ch. 6–7 on Seneca's theater); specific to Seneca's drama are Picone 1984, esp. 111 f. and Schiesaro 2003, 53 f. and *passim*, stressing the analogies between the tyrant and the inspired poet.

8 Cf. *Thyestes* 265–68, quoted *infra*, §8.

9 The diary of Mary Shelley provides a confirmation of her husband's interest in Seneca: on May 10, 1815, she took note that "Shelley reads Seneca everyday and all day," cf. Curran 1970, 246.

Senecan echoes resound in Heinrich von Kleist's *Penthesilea* (1808), a drama focused on a conflict between rage and love within the soul of the protagonist. Penthesilea, who is prey to these conflicting passions, kills Achilles in a duel, her bites rending his body into pieces, then commits suicide.¹⁰ Unable to use the dagger and arrows that her friend Prothoë has taken away, she kills herself with her pain, which has been fashioned metaphorically into a poisoned dagger:

For now I shall descend into my breast, / And dig a shaft, and quarry out the cold / Ore of a feeling that annihilates. / This ore I purify in fire of grief / To hardest steel; in poison then, of bitter, / Burning remorse, I soak it, through and through; / Now carry it toward Hope's eternal anvil, / And grind and sharpen it into a dagger; / And to this dagger now I yield my breast: / So! So! So! Again!—Now it is done. (*She falls and dies*).¹¹

In this way, Kleist combines Seneca's finale, where Phaedra rends her chest with a sword, and Racine's, where Phaedra prefers poison (also Medea's weapon of choice) to the sword.

4 Between Romanticism and Neoclassicism: de la Rosa's *Oedipus*

Martínez de la Rosa's *Oedipus* (1829) is closer to Neoclassicism, though the struggle of the protagonist, lonely and unaware of his origins, suffering under an adverse fate, reminds us of the great Romantic heroes.¹² Martínez follows the Sophoclean plot, but with some alterations responding to criticisms of improbability, made by Aristotle and more recently by Voltaire and La Motte. In particular, he omits the character of Creon, and combines the priest of

10 Memorable are the words of Penthesilea, commenting on her inner conflict, which led her to tear Achilles's body: "So war es ein Versehen. Küsse, Bisse, / Das reimt sich, und wer recht von Herzen liebt, / Kann schon das Eine für das Andre greifen" ("So it was a mistake. A kiss, a bite, / The two should rhyme, for one who truly loves / With all her heart can easily mistake them," Trans. J. Agee).

11 "Denn jetzt steig' ich in meinen Busen nieder, / Gleich einem Schacht, und grabe, kalt wie Erz, / Mir ein vernichtendes Gefühl hervor. / Dies Erz, dies läutr' ich in der Glut des Jammers / Hart mir zu Stahl; tränk' es mit Gift sodann, / Heißsätzendem, der Reue, durch und durch; / Trag' es der Hoffnung ew'gem Amboß zu, / Und schärf' und spitz es mir zu einem Dolch; / Und diesem Dolch jetzt reich' ich meine Brust: / So! So! So! So! Und wieder!—Nun ist's gut. (sie fällt und stirbt)."

12 Cf. esp. Mansour 1983.

Zeus and Tiresias into one person (as did Voltaire), the High Priest.¹³ This man (as is the case with the priest of Voltaire, but not in Seneca) knows the entire truth from the beginning, and therefore joins in himself the powers deriving from “possession of knowledge and his role as representative of the people.”¹⁴ This state of authority differs from the situation of Oedipus, who has no great authority, and above all no certainties. Finally, whereas in Sophocles (but also in later versions) all questions are ultimately resolved in Act 5, when Oedipus perceives his own faults, in Martínez, Oedipus discovers his crimes in sequence: he is a regicide (3.2), and then—after the usual arrival of Messenger from Corinth announcing the death of Polybus—he is guilty of patricide and incest (5.4). The appearance of Laius’s ghost, largely developed already by John Dryden and Nathaniel Lee, is also derived from Seneca.¹⁵ Because the character of Creon has been eliminated, who in Seneca reports the episode of necromancy, it is up to Oedipus himself to go into the pantheon of the kings and sacrifice at the tomb of Laius: on his path he sees the marble statues come to life, shouting with indignation: “Get off, profane, get off!” And then, as he recounts to his old tutor Hipparchus, the ghost miraculously appears to him:

The stone shattered into a thousand pieces with a crash; pale flames came out of the tomb, and, in the reflection, I saw the Ghost of Laius rise up angry, expand, grow, touch the clouds and his feet sink into the abyss . . . [...] He was wrapped in royal purple; however, the deep wound showed in his chest, and the gushing blood, seemed to splash against me . . . Astonished, upset, confused, I fell down to the ground; my voice unable to call to the terrible Ghost.¹⁶

13 From the beginning, Martínez and his Oedipus speak of “patricide” when referring to the killing of Laius, as a sign of respect, but also because of the influence of Voltaire (who employs only “parricide”, and never “homicide”). Thus, from the first scene, the sense of guilt seems unconsciously to afflict the protagonist, as in Seneca’s drama.

14 Paduano 1994, 344; on ‘doubt’ as a key-word of Seneca’s *Oedipus* and of the Senecan tradition, see Mastronarde 1970 and Citti – Iannucci 2012, xxvi ff.

15 The fortune of this specific episode is examined by Barberis 1992, 174–78.

16 “*Con estrépito la losa | Saltó en pedazos mil; pálidas llamas | Salieron del sepulcro; y al reflejo, | Vi la Sombra de Layo alzarse airada, | Extenderse, crecer, tocar las nubes, | Y en el profundo Abismo hundir la planta . . . [...] Envuelto estaba | En la púrpura real; mas de su pecho | Mostraba abierta la profunda llaga; | Y brotando la sangre, parecía | Que hasta mi misma frente salpicaba . . . | Atónito, turbado, confundido, | Por tierra me postré; la voz me falta | Para invocar á la tremenda Sombra.*”

Martínez closely follows the Senecan passage, which describes Creon's terror as the earth opens, allowing the dead shades to come to the surface (582–86):

Subito dehiscit terra et immenso sinu
laxata patuit—ipse torpentes lacus
vidi inter umbras, ipse pallentes deos
noctemque veram; gelidus in venis stetit
haesitque sanguis¹⁷

Among these shadows, Laius appears, lonely and uncertain at first, and then angry (619 ff.):

Tandem vocatus saepe pudibundum extulit
caput atque ab omni dissidet turba procul
celatque semet [...]
Laius—fari horreo:
[...] et ore rabido fatur¹⁸

There is a difference, however.¹⁹ While in Seneca, Laius gives explicit indication of Oedipus's guilt, in Martínez, the response from Laius's ghost is ambiguous: "*Huye, infeliz, del tálamo y del trono / Que mancha el crimen*" ("Flee, wretch, from the chamber and from the throne that the crime stains"). The words give rise in Oedipus to suspicion that the culprit is somehow Jocasta. Her arrival on the scene has been anticipated, as in Seneca, since scene four of the first act.

Also based largely on Sophocles is the farcical *Der romantische Oedipus* (*Romantic Oedipus*, 1829) by August von Platen, a comedy in five acts characterized by demythologized and prosaic language. Here the story of Oedipus is told in the order of actual events, starting with the birth and the child's exposure, followed by the prophecy of Tiresias, his adoption by Polybus and his wife Zelinda, the killing of Laius on the road to Delphi, and the encounter with the Sphinx. This last theme receives further development in literature from the late 1800s into the twentieth century (e.g., Péladan, Cocteau, and

17 "Suddenly the earth gaped and split into a vast cavity. With my own eyes I saw the pallid gods among the shades, I saw the stagnant lakes and authentic night. My blood stopped still, cold in my veins."

18 "The one repeatedly summoned at last raises his head, sullied as it is, but stays concealed far from the main crowd [...] Laius—I shudder to speak of it. [...] and speaks in rage."

19 For an analytical comparison of the scenes, cf. Estefanía 1997.

Dürrenmatt).²⁰ Next comes the marriage with Jocasta at Thebes. However, deriving from Seneca, either directly or indirectly, is the evocation of Laius's ghost in the cemetery, where he rests among cypresses and monuments: the ghost indicates that Oedipus is the culprit: OEDIPUS: *Wer erschlug dich, Alter?* GEIST DES LAJUS: *Du!* ("Oe. Who killed you, old man? GHOST: You!"). Soon after, Jocasta recognizes him as the son exposed years earlier. She therefore commits suicide, while Oedipus buries himself alive: a tragic ending for both characters, as in the play by Dryden and Lee.

5 "Now I am Medea": Egotism in Grillparzer's *Medea*

More influential is the Medea theme, thanks in part to the fortune of Cherubini's opera (*Medea*, 1797). The *Medea* by Viennese playwright Franz Grillparzer (included in the trilogy *Das goldene Vlies* [*The Golden Fleece*], 1821)—though drawing inspiration from a variety of texts (Hederich's *Gründliches mythologisches Lexikon*, Euripides, but also Apollonius of Rhodes, Ovid, and Valerius Flaccus)—adopted significant elements from Seneca's drama. Among these, as observed by Boyle,²¹ are: "the exemption of the children from Kreon's banishment, Kreon's weakness for the children, Medea's continuing love for Jason and her attempt to maintain her relationship with him, [...] the burning of the royal palace," but above all the characterization of Medea as sorceress, foreign and barbarous.²² Indeed, Medea will be fully herself only with the final revenge. This progressive fulfillment of her character is in Seneca highlighted by word-play between the name Medea and such words as *malum*, *mater*, *monstrum*,²³ and by two crucial self-affirmations of Medea, in the first and in the fifth act. In the initial dialogue, while in the distance resounds the hymeneus for the wedding of Jason and Creusa, the fearful nurse notices that "there is no loyalty

20 Respectively authors of *Oedipus and the Sphinx* (1897 Péladan and 1906 von Hofmannsthal), *The infernal machine* (1934), *The Dying of the Pythia* (1976): on the increasing interest in this topic, also in art, see Edmunds 2006, 106 ff.; as for the 'tragicomic Oedipus,' see Treu 2012.

21 Boyle 2014, cxxxii–cxxxiii.

22 The attribute "Colchian," too, is employed in a Senecan mood: compare Eur. *Medea* (131 f.): ἔκλυον δὲ βοᾶν / τὰς δυστάνου Κολχίδος ("I have heard the cry, of the unhappy woman of Colchis") with Sen. *Medea* (869–73): *quando efferet Pelasgis / nefanda Colchis arvis / gressum...?* ("When will the evil Colchian make her way from Pelasgian fields...?") and with Grillparzer, where Medea identifies herself as "*Der Wilden aus Kolchis*" ("that wild thing from Colchis," 4.78).

23 Traina 1979; Segal 1982.

in your husband, and nothing remains of your great wealth" (*coniugis nulla est fides / nihilque superest opibus e tantis tibi*), and Medea—conscious of her powers—responds with pride: *Medea superest*, "Medea remains" (166). Then the dialogue continues ominously: NURSE: *Medea*—MEDEA: *Fiam NU. Mater es.*—ME: *Cui sim vides.* ("Medea—: I shall become her : You are mother : You see for whom," 171). These lines are echoed in the final monologue, when the protagonist, after deciding to kill the children, can finally say: *Medea nunc sum; crevit ingenium malis* ("Now I am Medea: my genius has grown through evils").

This stylistic and psychological trait in the representation of Medea, perhaps the most characteristic of the Senecan versions (also present in Anouilh, as we shall see),²⁴ was highlighted by Corneille at the beginning of his tragedy, in the dialogue between Medea and Nerina,²⁵ and again in the dialogue with Aegeus, when Medea is ready for revenge: "*C'est demain que mon art fait triompher ma haine; / Demain je suis Médée*," (4.5.1250–51). Grillparzer invests even more importance in Medea's egotism, thereby recalling another characteristic of Seneca's tragedy: Medea's obsession with the past. Euripides's Medea is nostalgic for the past, but does not attempt to recover it. She focuses instead on revenge and escape. In Seneca, however, Medea frequently asks Jason and Creon to 'restore' the past to her (i.e. her full identity): a past preceding her status as a wife and mother, before the murder of her brother and father.²⁶ So in Grillparzer, Medea constantly reverts to the past, to her sins, committed for the love of Jason, who seems to have forgotten: in the dialogue between Medea and Jason, she complains of being forced to flee, but this time alone, and asks Jason to go with her: "*Komm, lass uns fliehn, vereint, mitsammen fliehn! / Es nehm' uns auf ein fernes Land!*" ("Come, let us flee together, once again / Made one in heart and soul! Some distant land / Will take us to its bosom," 3.349–50).²⁷ The lament of Medea was already in Seneca.²⁸ It is only to support Jason that Medea has committed horrible crimes, even at home, and yet she alone is condemned, unjustly. She protests: "*Die ganze Welt verwünsche mich, nur du nicht! / Du nicht, der Greuel Stifter, einz'ger Anlaß, du!*" ("Let all the world

24 See Friedrich 1960.

25 "NERINA: *Dans si grand revers que vous reste-t-il?* MEDEA: *Moi: / Moi, dis-je, et c'est assez*," (1.5.320–21).

26 Cf. Schiesaro 2003, 208–14.

27 English translation by T.A. Miller.

28 *quamvis enim sim clade miseranda obruta, / expulsa supplex sola deserta, undique / afflicta, quondam nobili fulsi patre / avoque clarum Sole deduxi genus*, "For though I am overwhelmed by pitiable disaster, exiled, a suppliant, alone, abandoned, afflicted on every side, yet once I shone in my noble father's light, and traced my bright ancestry from the Sun my grandfather" (207–10).

heap curses on my head, / Save only thee alone! Nay, thou shalt not! 'Twas thou inspiredst all these horrid deeds, / Yea, thou alone," 2.487–88). Likewise runs the lament of Seneca's Medea: (*Tua illa, tua sunt illa: cui prodest scelus, / is fecit—omnes coniugem infamem arguant, / solus tuere, solus insontem voca: / tibi innocens sit quisquis est pro te nocens*, "They are yours, they are yours: he who gains by a crime, committed it. Though everyone condemns your wife as infamous, you alone should defend her, you alone call her guiltless; one who is guilty for your sake should be innocent in your eyes," 500–503). But, compared with Seneca, Grillparzer's Medea is more fragile, and even confused, wavering between what she was and what conventions seem to demand of her. At the beginning of the tragedy, she buried a box containing all the instruments of her magic. However, when, rejected and exiled, she feels lost, a stranger to herself, she asks Jason: "*Allein wer gibt Medeen mir, wer mich?*" ("But who shall give Medea back to me?" 2.474). Only after having dug up her box and recovered her magical powers does she regain her full identity, proclaiming: "*Medea bin ich wieder, Dank euch Götter!*" ("Medea, I am once more. Thanks to thee, kind gods!" 4.239).

Similarly, in Romantic and Decadent France, Medea is associated with the sublime, as a result of the debate started by Boileau: in his *Critical Reflections on some passages out of Longinus* (1693), he quoted the response of Medea to the Nurse (the "*Moi!*" of Corneille) as an example of the sublime, highlighting its extraordinary conciseness. Thus Medea establishes herself in reflections on the sublime, as in Diderot's *Sublime* entry in the *Encyclopédie* (1751), while Schiller (in his epistolary essay *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen*, 1795) considers Medea as an example of the pathetic, and her revenge as "aesthetically sublime." Therefore it is not without irony that Stendhal's Mathilde (*Red and Black*, 1830) also identifies herself with Medea, proclaiming, "Midst all these perils, I still have MYSELF."²⁹ In theatrical rewritings, though, she is characterized mostly as an enchantress and dark heroine (as in Catulle Mendès's *Medea*, 1898).³⁰

6 Phaedra: Metamorphosis of an Unconventional Heroine

An unconventional heroine in the fight against Victorian puritanism comes from Swinburne's *Phaedra* (included in *Poems and Ballads*, 1866): a short play

29 Cf. Doran 2015, 121 (quoting in full Boileau's passage on Medea); Cahill 2006 on the association between Medea and the sublime.

30 See Marchetti 2006.

consisting of four speeches by the heroine, accompanied by brief interventions of Hippolytus and the Chorus of Træzenian Women. The work recalls a number of models: Euripides, Ovid (*Phaëdra's Epistle to Hippolytus*), Racine, and also Seneca, who inspires, in particular, the encounter where Phaëdra confesses her love to Hippolytus.³¹ Swinburne's stepmother puts aside all shame, like Ovid's Phaëdra³² and Seneca's, who confesses, *serus est nobis pudor* ("shame is too late for me," 595). In fact, Swinburne's Phaëdra proudly owns her hybrid nature, facing the wrath of the chorus and Hippolytus (44–61):

CHORUS: Lady, this speech and majesty are twain;

Pure shame is of one counsel with the gods.

HIPPOLYTUS: Man is as beast when shame stands off from him.

PHÆDRA: Man, what have I to do with shame or thee?

I am not of one counsel with the gods.

I am their kin, I have strange blood in me,

I am not of their likeness nor of thine:

My veins are mixed, and therefore am I mad,

Yea therefore chafe and turn on mine own flesh,

Half of a woman made with half a god.

But thou wast hewn out of an iron womb

And fed with molten mother-snow for milk.

A sword was nurse of thine; Hippolyta,

That had the spear to father, and the axe

To bridesman, and wet blood of sword-slain men

For wedding-water out of a noble well,

Even she did bear thee, thinking of a sword,

And thou wast made a man mistakingly.

The madness and incestuous desire of Phaëdra are explained by the mixed nature of her blood. The concept of mixture is crucial, too, in Seneca's *Oedipus*, where in the middle of the tragedy the colors of the flames that rise from the sacrifice are intertwined, in the same way that Iris brings together various

³¹ Rossi 2008 gives a detailed examination of all the classical influences.

³² *qua licet et sequitur, pudor est miscendus amor; / dicere quae puduit, scribere iussit amor*, "Wherever modesty may attend on love, love should not lack in it; with me, what modesty forbade to say, love has commanded me to write," (9–10); *depudui, profugusque pudor sua signa reliquit*, "My modesty has fled, and as it fled it left its standards behind" (155).

colors into the rainbow: a clear allusion to incest.³³ From Seneca also stems the description of the “unkempt beauty” (*incomptus decor*, 657) of Hippolytus, who combines in himself the face of his father Theseus, and the bellicose nature of the Amazon Hippolyta. Also from Seneca derive the reaction of Hippolytus, who draws his sword menacingly, and Phaedra’s request that he follow through with this threat of violence and thus end her suffering.³⁴ Swinburne presents an analogous scene at the opening of his play (3–7):

HIPPOLYTUS: What, wilt thou turn my loathing to thy death?

PHÆDRA: Nay, I will never loosen hold nor breathe

Till thou have slain me; [...]

Draw now thy sword and smite me as thou art god.³⁵

However, while Seneca’s heroine is tormented and ready for a death that preserves her social respectability, in Swinburne, passion becomes a destructive impulse, a desire for death viewed as synonymous with *eros* (179–84):

I would I had been the first that took her death
 Out from between wet hoofs and reddened teeth,
 Splashed horns, fierce fetlocks of the brother bull!
 For now shall I take death a deadlier way,
 Gathering it up between the feet of love
 Or off the knees of murder reaching it.”

33 Cf. Sen. *Oed.* 314 ff.: *Non una facies mobilis flammae fuit: / imbrifera qualis implicat varios sibi / Iris colores, [...] caerulea fulvis mixta oberravit notis, / sanguinea rursus; ultima in tenebras abit*, “The flame was changeable, with more than one appearance. As Iris the shower-bringer weaves various colours into herself, [...] so it shimmered, its bluish colour mottled with yellow, and then blood red; at the end it trailed into blackness.” Also ‘intertwined’ are the Sphinx’s words: on this symbolism, see Bettini 2009, 192 ff.

34 HI. *Procul impudicos corpore a casto amove / tactus. [...] stringatur ensis, merita supplicia exigat.* [...] PH. *Hippolyte, nunc me compotem voti facis; / sanas furem. maius hoc voto meo est, / salvo ut pudore manibus immoriar tuis*, “HI. Keep your wanton touch far from my chaste body! [...] Out, sword, exact the penalty she deserves. [...] PH. Hippolytus, now you grant me fulfilment of my prayer, you heal my madness. To die at your hands with my honor safe—this is better than my prayer” (704–6; 710–12).

35 The scene was taken up also by Racine: cf. 2.5.703 ff. “*Crois-moi, ce monstre affreux ne doit point t’échapper. / Voilà mon coeur. C’est là que ta main doit frapper.* / [...] *Au défaut de ton bras prête moi ton épée. / Donne*” (“This dreadful monster won’t escape: believe me. / Here’s my heart. Here’s where your hand should strike me. [...] Instead of your arm lend me then your blade. / Offer it.” Trans. A.S. Kline).

Swinburne, together with Racine and Seneca, serve as models for the titanic and passionate *Phaedra* by Gabriele D'Annunzio (1909). In an interview, the author himself declares his debts to the tradition:

My heroine [...] is not the moaning sick woman of Euripides, who lies on her bed in torment, not daring to speak either to Hippolytus or to Theseus, but simply dies after tying the incriminating tablets to her pale hands. Nor does she resemble the Racinian '*grande dame*' [...]. My heroine is really the Cretan woman "whom her and her country's vice inflames": in the words of Seneca, "Cressa" as Hippolytus calls her contemptuously.³⁶

D'Annunzio's heroine, therefore—unlike that of Euripides, who severs her life in the midst of the drama—remains on stage until the end (as in Seneca and Racine), with a dramatic crescendo. The echoes drawn from models (Swinburne in particular) can sometimes be literal, but the differences are very noticeable with respect to the narrative. For example, the verses 710–13 of Seneca's tragedy³⁷ are drawn out in D'Annunzio to five pages, full of commands such as, "Seize the ax," "hit me," "rend me," "strike," "open my chest," "finish me off," "you must demolish me," "twist me" ("*impugna la mannaia*" "*colpiscimi*," "*fendimi*," "*percuoti*," "*il petto aprimi*," "*Finiscimi*," "*Bisogna che tu m'abbatta*," "*torcimi*"), with the unintended effect of depriving the scene of some of its intensity.

More broadly, Seneca's linearity contrasts with the complexity of D'Annunzio, who draws out the episodes, multiplies the characters, and complicates the plot. Thus, in the final scene, one can see both the affinities and

36 "La mia eroina [...] non è la gemebonda inferma euripidea che giace sul suo tormentoso letto e non osa parlare a Ippolito né osa parlare a Tèseo, ma sol morire legando alle sue mani esangui le tavolette accusatrici. Né pure somiglia alla « grande dame » raciniana [...]. La mia eroina è veramente la Cretese « che il vizio della patria arde e il suo vizio » secondo l'espressione di Seneca, « Cressa » la chiama Ippolito per dispregio." Cf. Citti – Neri 2001, Gibellini 1989, 103, Paratore 1966. According to D'Annunzio, Phaedra's uncontrolled nature is a flaw of her ancestry, from the monstrous pairing of her mother Pasiphae, wife of the Cretan king Minos, with a bull: in the interview D'Annunzio is quoting a passage from his own *Fedra* (2.944 ff.): "*perché / ben io son quella che gridavi, sono / Fedra di Pasifæ, / la sorella del Mostro di due forme, / la Cretese che il vizio della patria / arde e il suo vizio*," a passage reminiscent of Sen. *Phaedr.* 177: *quotiens amabit Cressa?* and more generally of 165 f. However, in Seneca, the Nurse is speaking, and not Hippolytus, as D'Annunzio says.

37 *Hippolyte, nunc me compotem voti facis; / sanas furem. Maius hoc voto meo est, / salvo ut pudore manibus immoriar tuis*, "Hippolytus, now you grant me fulfillment of my prayer, you heal my madness. To die at your hands with my honor safe—this is better than my prayer."

the differences between the two Phaedras: Seneca's Phaedra, while still in passion and desperate to see Hippolytus dead, is tormented by her guilt and seeks redemption in suicide, confessing: *falsa memoravi et nefas, / quod ipsa demens pectore insano hauseram, / mentita finxi. Vana punisti pater, / iuvenisque castus crimine incesto iacet, / pudicus, insons* ("I told a false story, and alleged with lies the outrage that I myself had madly dwelt on in my own crazed breast. As father you have punished in vain, and a chaste young man lies dead on an unchaste charge, though pure and innocent"). The Phaedra of D'Annunzio, on the other hand, is proud of her guilt and celebrates in death the perpetuation of her love for Hippolytus, setting herself well outside traditional ethical values.³⁸ It is precisely in the realm of death that she expects to have the final victory (3.549–51):³⁹

In my heart there is no longer human blood, no heartbeat. And with your arrow you cannot reach my other life. I still win!⁴⁰

7 Miguel de Unamuno, Senequism and Spain during the Interwar Period

Starting in late nineteenth century, Spain, thanks to the reflections of Menéndez Pelayo and Ángel Ganivet, there was a rediscovery of Seneca's philosophical works. This rediscovery initiated the cultural movement of Senequism, which recognized Seneca as the prototype of the common man devoted to reason in the fight against power and as the supreme representative of "Spanish natural philosophy." An outstanding figure in this context is Miguel de Unamuno, who attempted a reconciliation of Stoicism and Christianity. Maria Zambrano, in her book on militant Senequism titled *El pensamiento vivo de Séneca* (published in exile, Buenos Aires, 1944), put him alongside Seneca for his tragic end in 1936.⁴¹ It is not surprising that the version written by Miguel

³⁸ Cf. Giancotti 1989, 69.

³⁹ Clearly alluding to the invocation to death in Sen. *Phaedr.* 1188–1190: *o mors amoris una sedamen mali, / o mors pudoris maximum laesi decus, / confugimus ad te: pande placatos sinus*, "O death, sole relief from evil love, o death, greatest glory for blighted honour, I flee to you: open wide your merciful arms".

⁴⁰ "Nel mio cuore non è più sangue umano, / non è palpito. E giungere col dardo / non puoi l'altra mia vita. Ancora vinco!"

⁴¹ Cf. Citti – Neri 2001, 19–24; Zambrano 1998, 1–6, 32–37.

de Unamuno (1911)⁴² is entirely different from D'Annunzio's superhuman and Decadent *Phaedra*: it is a Christian *Phaedra*,⁴³ with contemporary characters and both a rustic and somewhat bourgeois setting, in which the protagonists are faced with love that violates conventions. At the end, Phaedra commits suicide offstage, ingesting medication after forgiving all, like a holy martyr, and prepares the final reconciliation: Hippolytus, who had been driven out of the house, is exculpated by a letter written by his stepmother, and can finally make peace with his father. The traditional tale is profoundly altered, as the author explains in an introductory note:

The generating theme of this tragedy is the same as Euripides's *Hippolytus* and Racine's *Phaedra*. The development is completely different from that of both tragedies. Among the characters, I have kept with the traditional names only Phaedra and Hippolytus; Euripides' nurse (*trophos*), Racine's Oenone, has become my Eustaquia. In Euripides appears also Venus, Diana, Theseus, two messengers, servants and a chorus of Troezenian women; Racine includes Theseus, Aricia, Theramenes, Ismene, Panope, and some guards.⁴⁴

Unamuno not only changes the name and reduces the number of characters, he carries on a real reduction of tone, to create what he calls a "naked theater" (*teatro desnudo*): only the bare essentials in costume and in all the elements of the scene, in order not to distract the public from the intensity of the tragic drama, and only the bare essentials in style, as compared to the inflated rhetoric of Seneca. According to some scholars,⁴⁵ the rejection of the rhetoric by anti-conformist intellectuals of the so-called "Generation of '98" would have led Unamuno not to mention Seneca among his models. Nonetheless, Unamuno seems to have been influenced in many aspects by his drama.⁴⁶ Influence manifests in the *ratio/furor* dichotomy evident in the behavior of the

⁴² Cf. Valbuena-Briones 1987, Pociña 1999, 303–9 and Escobar Borrego 2002.

⁴³ As the author says, in a letter to Jacques Chevalier, January 3, 1912.

⁴⁴ "El argumento generador de esta tragedia es el mismo del *Hipólito* de Eurípides y de la *Fedra* de Racine. El desarrollo es completamente distinto del de ambas tragedias. De los personajes de aquéllas sólo he conservado con sus propios nombres tradicionales a Fedra e Hipólito, la nodriza (*trophos*) de Eurípide, Oenone en Racine, ha cambiado en mi EUSTAQUIA. En Eurípides figuran además Venus, Diana, Teseo, dos nuncios, criados y un coro de mujeres trezenias, y en Racine, Teseo, Aricia, Teramenes, Ismena, Panope y guardias."

⁴⁵ Cf. Valbuena-Briones 1987, 5; Escobar Borrego 2002, 72 n. 6.

⁴⁶ For these aspects, I am indebted in particular to the analysis by Escobar Borrego 2002; see also Almodóvar García 1989.

individual characters, and embodied in particular in the contrast between the stepmother and Hippolytus. Phaedra, in her fervent passion, is characterized as miserable and crazy. She says of herself: “¡Soy una miserable! ¡Loca, sí, loca perdida!” (“I am a wretch! Crazy, yeah, crazy lost! 1.11). So, too, in Seneca, where she is depicted as *misera*, *amens*, and *demens*.⁴⁷ Hippolytus, on the other hand, is rational and composed, almost like a Stoic sage: in fact, a friend describes him to his father Pedro (the myth of Theseus) by saying, “*Tu hijo es uno de los hombres más equilibrados, más dueños de sí, más serenos, más sanos que conozco*” (“Your son is one of the most balanced, most self-controlled, most serene, healthiest men that I know”). But when faced with the stepmother’s confession of her love, Hippolytus seems to lose his self-control. Phaedra’s frank declaration of her love is a feature of Seneca’s play. It is taken up by Racine, but only in Seneca does she ask her stepson not to call her “mother.”⁴⁸ The scene is even more explicit in Unamuno (1.4):

PHAEDRA: May I not live seeing you belong to another woman!

HIPPOLYTUS: (*Alarmed*) How? What? I do not understand you, mother!

PH. You by another? Impossible!

HI. (*Retreating*) Mother!

PH. (*Advancing towards him*) Do not call me mother, by God, Hippolytus!
Call me Phaedra!

HI. Phaedra!

PH. Not so, no! Do not! Not so, Hippolytus! Do you understand now?

HI. I do not want to understand you. . .

PH. Do you understand now, even without going out to the countryside?

HI. Ah! So was it this, this, the warmth of your kisses?

PH. Yes, it was this, Hippolytus, this; come, look . . .

HI. No! Do not!⁴⁹

47 Cf. *Phaedr.* 113; 120 f.; 142 (*misera*); 202 (*demens*); 702 and 1180 (*amens*).

48 HI. *Committe curas auribus, mater, meis.* / PH. *Matris superbum est nomen et nimium potens: / nostros humilium nomen affectus decet, / me vel sororem, Hippolyte, vel famulam voca, / famulamque potius: omne servitium feram* “HI. Entrust your cares to my ears, mother. PH. The name of mother is too grand and mighty. A humbler name suits my feelings: call me sister, Hippolytus, or servant—yes, servant is better: I will bear any servitude,” (608–12).

49 “FEDRA: ¡Que no podría yo vivir viéndote de otra! / HIPÓLITO: (*Alarmado*.) ¿Cómo? ¿Qué? ¿No te entiendo bien, madre! / FEDRA: ¿Tú de otra? ¡Imposible! / HIPÓLITO: (*Arredrándose*.) ¡Madre! / FEDRA: (*Yendo hacia él*.) No me llames madre, por Dios, Hipólito, ¡llámame Fedra! / HIPÓLITO: ¡Fedra! / FEDRA: ¡No, así no! ¡No! ¡No así, Hipólito! ¿Me entiendes ahora? / HIPÓLITO: No quisiera entenderte . . . / FEDRA: ¿Lo ves claro ahora sin salir

It is in the finale, where Phaedra's confession and Hippolytus's reconciliation with his father mark the triumph of reason and Christian ethics over *furor*.

Unamuno adopts a different solution for his *Medea* (1933): a prose translation,⁵⁰ extremely faithful to the Latin, authentically classic, designed for a performance by Margarita Xiru and Enrique Borrás in the newly restored Roman Theatre in Mérida. In an article published in *Il Sol* of Madrid on June 24, 1933, Unamuno explains the principles guiding this adaptation:

I unearthed it from a baroque Latin, to dress her without trimmings or supplements, in pure Castilian prose, which meant the restoration of ruins. With my version I tried to make echo, under the Spanish sky of Mérida, the very sky of Cordova—the stylistic and conceptual impetus of Seneca, but in a language born from the ruins of his.⁵¹

Although the author claims not to have removed or added anything, there are alterations in style, which sometimes is lowered (as in the case of *innocens mulier*, 947, which becomes “*inocente mujerzuela*”),⁵² and some omissions, for example in the stichomythia between the Nurse and Medea. As we have seen, this is a crucial passage in Seneca. Unamuno retains the rhythm, but only in part, giving up the famous *Medea . . . fiam* (171):⁵³ “NODRIZA Huye. / MEDEA Me peso la huida. . . Huir Medea? / NO. Madre eres. / ME. Por quien ya lo ves.”

The decision to translate Seneca rather than Euripides is probably due to the desire to stage a more dramatic heroine, and express through the pair Medea/Jason the contrast *furor/ratio*: Jason, with the loss of his children, and therefore of his future, represents a dramatic type particularly exploited by Unamuno. The representation, and in particular the interpretation by Margarita Xiru, had great success. Yet, harsh criticism came from Antonin Artaud, who, having

al campo? / HIPÓLITO: ¡Ah! ¿Y era esto, esto, el calor de tus besos? / FEDRA: Sí, esto era, Hipólito, esto; ven, mira . . . / HIPÓLITO: ¡No! ¡No!”

50 Only three choruses, in verse, were to be put to music by Oscar Esplá, who, however, did not finish the job in time: these texts have been published only recently by Robles Carcedo 1998.

51 “La desenterré de un latín barroco para ponerla sin cortes ni glosas, en prosa de paladino romance castellano, lo que ha sido también restaurar ruinas. Pretendí con mi versión hacer resonar bajo el cielo hispánico de Mérida el cielo mismo de Córdoba, los arranques conceptistas y culteranos de Séneca, pero en la lengua brotada de las ruinas de la suya.”

52 Cf. Senabre 2008, 30 f.

53 The final *Medea nunc sum; crevit ingenium malis* (910), is instead translated with “*Ahora sí que soy Medea; medro con las maldades el ingenio*”.

attended a performance on February 7, 1936 in Mexico City, wrote an article revealingly titled "A Medea without fire."⁵⁴ According to Artaud:

Seneca's *Medea* is a mythical world. Margherita Xirgu has no spark and fails to reach such a world. Myths must not be debased, and if they are, we can just as well resign ourselves to being mere mortals, and what pitiful anthropomorphism that would be. [...] In this tragedy monsters should have pounced, we should have been shown that we are amongst monsters, the monsters of primitive imagination seen through a primitive mind.⁵⁵

The criticism focuses on the staging (clothes, props and stage acting), rather than on the text. But Artaud, who saw in Seneca a model for his "Theater of Cruelty," was necessarily inimical to the idea of simplicity, "*teatro desnudo*," and to Unamuno's objectives. The conclusion is scathing:

It is not by making the *music-hall* lighting shine on the dust cloths which I have just described that one could convey the supernatural feeling of terror which springs from the truly magical text of Seneca who was a real initiate, whereas the modern tragedians are nothing but puppets and tumblers.⁵⁶

8 Seneca and the Theater of Cruelty and Words: Artaud and Eliot

Before this, in the 1920s, as a result of studies by Léon Herrmann (*Le théâtre de Sénèque*, Paris 1924) and Otto Regenbogen (*Schmerz und Tod in den Tragödien Senecas*, 1928), we witnessed a critical re-evaluation of the same elements that Romanticism had criticized: philosophical examination of passions and sufferings, both psychological and physical, together with attention to language. This last element in particular is the focus of T.S. Eliot's influential

54 Cf. Sanchez Léon 1999.

55 Trans. C. Schumacher. "*La Médée de Sénèque, c'est un monde mythique; Margarita Xirgu manque de feu et passe à côté de ce monde-là. Il ne faut pas rapetisser les mythes, sinon on se résigne à n'être qu'un homme, et que voilà un misérable anthropomorphisme. [...] Il fallait dans cette tragédie que bondissent des monstres, il fallait montrer qu'on était entre monstres, les monstres de l'imagination primitive vus au travers de l'esprit primitif.*"

56 "*Ce n'est pas en faisant jouer des éclairages de music-hall moderne sur les chiffons à poussière que j'ai décrits tout à l'heure que l'on pourra nous donner une idée de l'atmosphère surnaturelle d'épouvante qui sourd du texte vraiment magique de Sénèque qui, lui, était un initié authentique alors que les tragédiens modernes ne sont que des marionnettes et des saltimbanques.*"

essay “Seneca in the Elizabethan Translations” (1927):⁵⁷ Eliot does not ignore the flaws and rhetorical excesses of Seneca’s theater, but he partly explains them by the fact that his drama was intended for declamation and not for stage;⁵⁸ therefore, he concludes epigrammatically that “in the plays of Seneca, the drama is all in the word, and the word has no further reality behind it.” Eliot recognizes his extraordinary talent for *coups de théâtre* (such as the shocking “final cry of Jason to Medea departing in her car”),⁵⁹ and for “epigrammatic observation on life or death [...] put in the most telling way at the most telling moment” (such as the dazed and uncertain questions of Hercules, unable to recognize the place where he is).⁶⁰ Seneca’s sententious style fascinated Eliot, as it had already captivated the Elizabethans. In particular, he is struck by “a trick of Seneca of repeating one word of a phrase in the next phrase, especially in stichomythia, where the sentence of one speaker is caught up and twisted by the next,” a trick which becomes “the crossing of one rhythm pattern with another,” and sometimes also the breaking up of lines “into minimum antiphonal units,” as in the dialogue between Medea and the Nurse, already mentioned (168 and following).

The dramatic power of the word, together with a focus on families caught in destructive conflicts and cycles of revenge (extending even to incest and cannibalism), with an interplay between the roles of victim and perpetrator, are what Antonin Artaud appreciates in Seneca:⁶¹ he considers his drama as a prime model for his theories on the “Theater of cruelty”—a theater that should disturb like a plague⁶²—and also for his dramas (the unfinished *Le Supplice de Tantale* [*Torment of Tantalus*], originally entitled *Atrée et Thyeste* [*Atrous*

57 Cf. Citti – Neri 2001, 87–89; Lanati 2001, 97–108.

58 Speaking of the first three hundred verses of the *Hercules furens*, which a Greek spectator would never have endured, Eliot (1948, 70) observes that: “The whole situation is inconceivable unless we assume the play to have been composed solely for recitation; [...] Seneca’s plays might, in fact, be practical models for the modern ‘broadcast drama’.”

59 Cf. Sen. *Med.* 1026 f. *Per alta vada spatia sublimi / aethere; testare nullos esse, qua veheris, deos*, “Travel on high through the lofty spaces of heaven, and bear witness where you ride that there are no gods”.

60 Cf. Sen. *Herc. f.* 1036 f. *Ubi sum? Sub ortu solis, an sub cardine / glacialis ursae?* “Where am I? Beneath the sun’s rising, or beneath the turning point of the icy Bear?”, a passage he revisits in the lyric *Marina* (1930, *Ariel Poems*).

61 See esp. Stout 1996, 85–103; and also on Seneca and Artaud, Citti – Neri 2001, 117–19; Sánchez León 1997; 2003 and 2007, 57–60.

62 “The Theater and the Plague” is the title of an essay by Artaud: for possible analogies with the physical and psychological plague in Seneca’s *Oedipus*, cf. Goodall 1990.

and *Thyestes*], and *Les Cenci* [*The Cenci*], 1935). As he wrote in a letter to Jean Paulhan on December 16, 1932,

he [*i.e.* Seneca] seems to me the greatest tragic author in history, an intimate in the secrets who knew better than Aeschylus how to put them into words. I cry as I read his inspired theater, and underneath the sound of syllables, I sense the transparent seething of the forces of chaos frothing at the mouth. [...] You can't find a better *written* example of what is meant by cruelty in the theater than in *all* the Tragedies of Seneca, but especially in *Atréus and Thyestes*. Visible in the Blood, it is even more so in the mind. These monsters are wicked as only blind forces can be, and theater only exists, I believe, on a level which is not yet human.⁶³

Even if complete, the *Torment of Tantalus* was never staged. Artaud intended to carry out a "totally revolutionary" representation, in an extratheatrical environment, which would highlight not only the violence and cruelty, but also the superhuman element: namely, the fate, embodied by the shadow of Tantalus and by the Furies, the fate that sways the Senecan characters, who feel a psychic force that transcends their wills. Atréus, for example, says (267–270):

Nescioquid animo maius et solito amplius
supraque fines moris humani tumet
instatque pigris manibus—haud quid scio, sed grande quiddam est⁶⁴

Seneca's influence, both direct and mediated through Shelley, can be recognized also in *The Cenci*. Here, Count Cenci goes from incestuous perpetrator to become the victim of patricide by Beatrice. For her part, Beatrice, who is sentenced to death by a church tribunal, is perceived as an innocent victim. This is the cathartic power of the theater of cruelty, in which actions are determined by superior forces: for example, Count Cenci admits to

63 Trans. V. Conti. "*celui-ci [i.e. Seneca] me paraît le plus grand auteur tragique de l'histoire, un initié aux Secrets et qui mieux qu'Eschyle a su les faire passer dans les mots. Je pleure en lisant son théâtre d'inspiré, et j'y sens sous le verbe des syllabes crépiter de la plus atroce manière le bouillonnement transparent des forces du chaos [...]. On ne peut mieux trouver d'exemple écrit de ce qu'on peut entendre par cruauté au théâtre que dans toutes les Tragédies de Sénèque, mais surtout dans l'Atrée et Thyeste. Visible dans le Sang, elle l'est encore plus dans l'esprit. Ces monstres sont méchants comme seules des forces aveugles peuvent l'être, et il n'y a théâtre, je pense, qu'au degré pas encore humain.*"

64 "Something greater, larger than usual, beyond normal human limits, is swelling in my spirit and urging my sluggish hands. What it is I do not know, but it is something mighty."

doing evil “by fate and out of principle,” and that he could not “resist the forces that are burning with desire to break out in me,” a theme, as we have seen, that Artaud could find in *Thyestes*. From *Thyestes* also probably derives the insistent reference to cannibalism, which Artaud added at a later time in the third scene of the first act, where the Count Cenci celebrates at banquet the death of his children: a scene already developed by Shelley, but that Artaud has deliberately inflated with more macabre tone.

Contrary to this tendency is the classicizing theater, lyrical and rhetorical—indifferent to Artaud’s experimentalism and uninterested in Seneca’s ‘Freudian,’ psychological topics⁶⁵—pursued by José María Pemán (1898–1981), a versatile writer closely linked to the traditionalist and conservative environment of the Franco dictatorship: after an *Oedipus* (1945), mainly based on Sophocles⁶⁶ with some Senecan borrowings and personal additions, in 1955, Pemán staged in the Roman theater of Mérida a *Tyestes*. *La tragedia de la venganza* (*Thyestes: The tragedy of revenge*).⁶⁷ As specified by the subtitle, it is a “New and free version of a classical myth [...] inspired by Seneca’s tragedy” (“*Versión nueva y libre / de un mito clásico [...] inspirada en la tragedia de / Séneca*”). In order to liven up the slow and monologue-driven action in the model, Pemán introduces a series of characters engaged in dialogue (the shadow of Tantalus, Fury, Anger, Blood, Revenge and Death), who sometimes recite the meditative sections that in Seneca were entrusted to the chorus. He also complicates the story by introducing the jealousy of Atreus, who is characterized by an inability to love. Atreus discovers that his wife Aerope is secretly the mother of the sons of Thyestes—one more reason to prepare the horrid banquet for his brother.

9 The Postwar Period and the Definitive Consecration of Seneca

Unlike Artaud, other interpretations set the drama in a more quotidian and contemporary setting. So it is with Jean Anouilh’s *Medea* (1946), where the heroine is a foreigner, “chased, beaten, scorned, without a country, without a home,” who has taken refuge among the caravans of a gypsy camp, far from the village. Anouilh adopts Seneca’s story (mediated through the translation by Léon Herrmann), with some minor changes: he omits the prologue, the

65 Cf. Segal 1983, Paduano 1994, 249 ff., Schiesaro 2003.

66 Pociña 2012, 282–89; García Fuentes 1997 identifies some Senecan echoes, but see Citti – Neri 2001, 122–25.

67 Zatlin 1962, 114–23, Citti – Neri 2001, 119–21 and García Fuentes 1999.

chorus (replaced by the nurse, who assists Medea),⁶⁸ and the long scene of witchcraft.⁶⁹ But he expands the dialogue between Jason and Medea (which in Seneca occupies about one-eighth of the tragedy, while in Anouilh is more than a third of the total), and profoundly alters the finale, where Medea commits suicide in the flames of her caravan, after defying Jason to try to forget her: “*Je suis Médée, enfin, pour toujours! [...] C’est l’horrible Médée! Et essaie maintenant de l’oublier!*” (“I am Medea at last and forever! . . . I, the horrible Medea! And now try to forget her!”). But Jason does not indulge in a hopeless lament over the divine injustice, as in Seneca.⁷⁰ Instead, he returns to his normal daily life:

Yes, I will forget you. Yes, I will live. And in spite of the bloody trace of your passage near me, tomorrow with patience I will reconstruct my poor and fragile human edifice under the indifferent eyes of the gods. (*He turns toward his men*) One of you watch the fire till only ashes remain, until the last bone of Medea is burned. The rest of you come with me. Let us go to the palace. Now we must live, secure order, give Corinth laws, and without illusions rebuild a world befitting us in which to wait and die.⁷¹

Anouilh, therefore, emphasizes the contrast within the pair Medea/Jason: this is a private contrast, because the two are tired of living together. Medea regrets having sacrificed everything for her husband, while Jason can no longer bear the excesses of his wife and is eager to return to a normal life. It is also a conflict of ideals: the struggle between an absolutist and a diplomat, whose sole objective is a dubious happiness (“*bonheur*”). For this reason, the issue of self-liberation from the constraints and bonds of union (Jason’s desire for peace and comfort is diametrically opposed to Medea’s need to actualize

68 Cf. Lapp 1954, Servais 1956 and Citti – Neri 2001, 103–7 (with bibliography).

69 Robinson Jeffers is different, who potentially borrows from Seneca the theme of magic, the invocation to Hecate, and also occasionally makes allusions in his own *Medea* (1946), a free version from Euripides, linked to current events, making the protagonist a ‘monster’, exactly in the Artaudian sense. See Boyle 2014, cxxxvii–cxxxviii.

70 See above, n. 44.

71 Trans. L. and A. Klein. “*Oui, je t’oublierai. Oui, je vivrai et malgré la trace sanglante de ton passage à côté de moi, je referai demain avec patience mon pauvre échafaudage d’homme sous l’œil indifférent des dieux. (Il se tourne vers les hommes) Qu’un de vous garde autour du feu jusqu’à ce qu’il n’y ait plus que de cendres, jusqu’à ce que le dernier os de Médée soit brûlé. Venez, vous autres. Retournons au palais. Il faut vivre maintenant, assurer l’ordre, donner des lois à Corinthe et rebâtir sans illusions un monde à notre mesure pour y attendre de mourir.*”

herself) becomes so central to Medea that the killing of children is an integral part of the story, yet somehow irrelevant, only a vestige of the ancient version.⁷² Thus, Medea's self-affirmation ("*Je suis Médée*"; "*Je me retrouve. . . C'est moi, c'est Médée! Ce n'est plus une femme attachée à l'odeur d'un homme, cette chienne couchée qui attend*" "*voilà que Médée s'éveille! Haine! Haine! . . . je renais*" ("I am Medea!"; "I have found myself again . . . Now again I am Medea! I am no longer that woman bound to the smell of a man, that bitch in heat who waits"; "Now Medea is awakening again. Hatred. Hatred! . . . I am reborn") is repeated obsessively, a dozen times throughout the tragedy.⁷³ As in Seneca, the rebirth of Medea corresponds to the recovery of her past, a past of total freedom. But, unlike Seneca, where Medea gradually recovers herself (*Medea fiam*), in Anouilh the heroine has already found herself back when she just learned of the new marriage of Jason, which for her means freedom from marriage and maternity.⁷⁴

After Freud's historic page on Oedipus in his *Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), which juxtaposes Oedipus with Hamlet, Seneca's rewriting of Oedipus (an uncertain king, really prey to feelings of guilt from the first lines of the drama) cannot fail to involve the unconscious. Even Jean Cocteau cannot avoid doing so. In his *Machine Infernale* (*Infernal Machine*, 1932), he proposes a light and demythologized reinterpretation of Sophocles's play, deconstructing the whole story chronologically: he starts with the night when Oedipus encounters the Sphinx; he transitions next to the wedding night of Oedipus and Jocasta—a night tormented by Freudian and Oedipal dreams—and finally to the traditional story of Sophocles's *Oedipus rex*. A Senecan influence,⁷⁵ direct or through the mediation of Dryden-Lee and Shakespeare's Hamlet, is first detectable in the appearance of the ghost of Laius on the walls of Thebes, seeking to warn Jocasta not to marry Oedipus. Senecan, too, is the characterization of the priest (traditionally Tiresias, here familiarly called Zizi), unable to interpret events, wavering (*dubius* is a keyword in Seneca),⁷⁶ and the great attention given to the influence of higher forces: the gods and the fates. In fact, says the

72 Cf. Kaliss 1971, 215 f.

73 Documentation in Citti – Neri 2001, 104, see also Rambaux 1972.

74 For this perspective, cf. Castellana 2006, 156.

75 "Cocteau's Senecan connection" is examined in detail by Leadbeater 1990. Seneca's style emerges at times also in *Oedipus Rex*, an opera composed by Cocteau following Sophocles's plot, translated into Latin by Danielou and set to music by Stravinsky (1927).

76 Cf. Mastronarde 1970.

Voice (somehow a substitute for the chorus, which introduces all four acts), explaining the title of the drama:

Watch now, spectator. Before you is a fully wound machine. Slowly its springs will unwind the entire span of a human life. It is one of the most perfect machines ever devised by the infernal gods for the mathematical destruction of a mortal.⁷⁷

By the mid-twentieth century, the theater of Seneca will gain a more secure place, with translations, rewritings, and reproductions (such as the famous *Oedipus* by Ted Hughes, 1968, and Hugo Claus's *Thyestes*, 1966),⁷⁸ designed to champion that theater of passions and words that the Romantics had so bitterly criticized.

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⁷⁷ Trans. A. Bernel. "Regarde, spectateur, remontée à bloc, de telle sorte que le ressort se déroule avec lenteur tout le long d'une vie humaine, une des plus parfaites machines construites par les dieux infernaux pour l'anéantissement mathématique d'un mortel."

⁷⁸ On this play, see Citti – Neri 2001, 84–86, Lanati 2001, 115–40 and Harrison 2009, 152–58; on Hugo Claus's *Thyestes*, see van Zyl Smit 2015.

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Seneca Our Contemporary: The Modern Theatrical Reception of Senecan Tragedy

Ralf Remshardt

When Polish critic Jan Kott published his book *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* more than fifty years ago, he set in motion not just a theoretical reconsideration of Shakespeare's relevance in the cultural aftermath of the Second World War but (in a surprisingly far-ranging effect for a literary scholar) sparked countless revisionist theatrical stagings as well. Forcefully positing a thematic connection between Shakespeare and postwar dramatists such as Bertolt Brecht, Friedrich Dürrenmatt, and Samuel Beckett, Kott's influential readings (e.g., his chapter on "King Lear, or Endgame")¹ led to landmark productions such as Peter Brook's grimly absurdist take on *King Lear* (1962). This essay stands in the wake of Kott but attempts the obverse. That Seneca is our contemporary—that he is perceived, in other words, as a pertinent writer whose dispatches from the extremes of the Julio-Claudian Roman Empire speak to our own sense of fragmentation and ethical ambiguity—is manifest in the fact that his plays appear on contemporary Western stages with some frequency, often in tandem with periods of social transition or upheaval. My question here is what the Senecan values might be that communicate themselves most readily to current audiences, and what forms of *mise-en-scène* directors use to explore them.

The question of the plays' performance in antiquity has remained a kind of parlor game among some Seneca scholars, who have expended much ingenuity to prove either that they were intended for production on the public stages of the early Roman Empire, or that, to the contrary, Seneca had no interest in the theater at all, or some contested middle ground: public recitation, private recitation, etc. Unfortunately, all evidence is internal and circumstantial, and thus inconclusive. In fact, whether a critic believes in the presence of Senecan drama on the Roman stage seems determined less by tangible evidence than by the critic's biases; as John G. Fitch points out (2000: 1), the anti-performance view became canonical in the late nineteenth century after leading Romantic

1 Kott (1964: 90) wrote that in *King Lear*, "the tragic element has been superseded by the grotesque."

critics uttered their distaste of what they perceived as Senecan excess. For the purpose of this essay, what matters is not whether they were meant to be staged (as I believe they were), but whether they are stage-worthy.²

1 The ‘Senecanization’ of the Modern Theater

Arguably, the modern and postmodern theater has affirmed the stage-worthiness of Seneca’s tragedies; it has been more hospitable to Seneca than any theater since the Renaissance. In concrete terms, the number of performances speaks volumes. Using the most comprehensive listing currently available, Oxford University’s *Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama*,³ we find almost as many documented productions of Senecan tragedies between 1900 and 2015 (244) as we do between 1450 and 1900 (249). *Medea* remains the most popular, with 113 attested productions prior to 1900, versus 90 between 1900 and the present. Interestingly, there have been twenty-seven performances of *Thyestes* since 1900, but only six are recorded before that date. *Hercules on Oeta*, however, has come to the stage just twice since the advent of the twentieth century, although it appeared thirty-one times before 1900.⁴ Because of the comparatively much better documentation of modern and contemporary performances, these figures are not absolute. Nevertheless, it is evident that Senecan tragedy experienced something of a boom in the modern theater, with a high percentage of twentieth-century productions occurring after 1950, and clustering in the 1960s through 1990s. There were a few scattered stabs at reviving Seneca in the first part of the twentieth century, though. For instance, the early 1900s saw two opera productions incorporating both Euripides’s *Hippolytus* and Seneca’s *Phaedra*: a 1903 production of Jean-Philippe Rameau’s

2 I see no reason to disagree with Léon Herrmann (1924: 195), who writes: “The theory that we adopt is that all of the tragedies of Seneca, without exception, were intended by him for presentation at a public or private theater, with actors, chorus, and music.” For a brief summary of the performance discussion, see Anthony J. Boyle 2014: xli–xliii. Boyle is unequivocal in his judgment: “Senecan tragedy belongs, if anything does, to the category of Roman performance theatre” (xliii). Regarding its stage-worthiness, Frederick Ahl (2008: 4) points out that when he undertook to stage Seneca (in his case, *Oedipus*), he “was delighted at what good theater it was.”

3 Accessible at <http://apgrd.ox.ac.uk>.

4 Other figures: there are four documented productions of *Agamemnon* after 1900 compared to fourteen in the entire period prior to 1900. *Hercules* also received four productions (four pre-1900); *Octavia* four (nine pre-1900); *Phoenician Women* one (two pre-1900); *Oedipus* twenty-six (nineteen); *Phaedra* forty-seven (thirty-four); and *Trojan Women* twenty-six (sixteen).

eighteenth-century *Hippolyte et Aricie* in Geneva and a *Fedra* by Ildebrando Pizzetti with a blended libretto by Gabriele D'Annunzio at Milan's Scala Theater in 1917. Hanns-Henny Jahn's expressionistic *Medea*, based on Seneca and Euripides as well as pieces of Ovid and Hesiod, was presented under the direction of Leopold Jessner at the Berlin Staatstheater in 1925. The brief opera *Médée* by modernist composer Darius Milhaud (with a libretto by his wife) was seen in 1938 in Paris and Antwerp. Gabriel Boissy's translation of *Trojan Women* (*Les Troyennes*) played briefly at the Théâtre National du Palais de Chaillot in occupied Paris in 1943. But it was not until after World War II that a confluence of existentialist philosophy with a reexamination of the classical age created a more hospitable context for productions of the Roman playwright. To be sure, Seneca remained an outlier in ancient tragedy with a relatively modest total number of productions compared to the canonical versions of the myths: against twenty-six appearances of Seneca's *Oedipus* in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, there are 796 documented productions of the Sophoclean version, a ratio of about 1:30. It is still comparatively rare that even the best known of Seneca's tragedies are staged, let alone, as was done in Paris in 1995, a cycle of all Seneca plays.⁵

In light of the figures alone, it might be presumptuous to speak of a 'Senecanization' of the modern theater, and yet there is clearly a kind of sympathetic convergence between Seneca's style and some of the most salient features of modernist and postmodernist drama—from the anguished, lonely protagonists and the overheated rhetoric of expressionism, through the Neo-Stoic contemplation of a morally vacant universe by the absurdists, to the spasms of sudden and inexplicable violence of the 'In-Yer-Face' plays of the 1990s.⁶ Beyond the theatrical resonances, of course, lies the entire realm of popular culture whose tropes, images, and discourses—particularly, for instance, the celebration of overt and graphic violence, or the motif of revenge in films from Sam Peckinpah to Quentin Tarantino—informs the theater both subliminally and explicitly with a 'Senecan' quality.

Similarly, certain inbuilt structural traits of Senecan drama such as its meta-theatrical self-awareness as drama and performance, as well as its refusal of closure in the Aristotelian mold, resonate with modern and contemporary playwriting. Alessandro Schiesaro (2003: 62), for instance, in an exemplary analysis of the *Thyestes*, diagnoses a "critical gap" set up by the play's construction, a

5 See Peter J. Davis 2003: 35.

6 So named, with a nod to Cockney argot, by critic Alex Sierz (2001). Associated playwrights are Sarah Kane and Mark Ravenhill, among others. See below for a discussion of Kane's *Phaedra's Love*.

“multiplication of points of view” that forestalls a unified audience response—a description that could, with modification, be applied to the theories of epic theater and alienation promulgated by Bertolt Brecht in the 1920s and 1930s.⁷ The Senecan character, too, is markedly ‘modern’ in his proneness to self-analysis. Frederick Ahl (2008: 31) comments that Seneca’s Oedipus, in distinction to Sophocles’s, “admits to us his thoughts and fears in his monologues almost as if he were disclosing his inner self to a psychiatrist,” and argues that Freud’s familiar notion of the Oedipus Complex could be more effectively argued from the Roman text than from the Greek.

In the following, I will make less-than-stringent distinctions between productions that are influenced by Senecan drama, those that are adaptations of Senecan texts, and those that are faithful or authentic (whatever that may mean) performances of the plays as transmitted. Often, the bloodline from Seneca to his modern adaptations is not directly visible; his influence may be present only in traces, in certain theatrical gestures or attitudes. For instance, a recent play by noted American playwright Sam Shepard, *A Particle of Dread* (2013), a fragmentary adaptation of *Oedipus* based ostensibly on Sophocles, contains shocking and bloody incidents of graphic horror including the onstage sacrifice of animals for oracular purposes. The scene appears reminiscent of the Manto scene in Seneca’s version of *Oedipus*, but there is no proof that Shepard’s borrowing is conscious or intentional.⁸

For a theatrical translator, adapter, or director to choose Seneca *intentionally* over the familiar versions of myths is to make a deliberate decision against the grain, even a gesture of refutation to the sanctified notions of classical tragedy with their ethos of balance and moderation and their offer of catharsis. In that sense, to prefer Seneca over Aeschylus, Sophocles, or Euripides is to put an intertextual as well as a metatheatrical discourse into view and into play: at every moment, a production of Seneca’s *Medea* will not only be itself, but also not-Euripides, it will necessarily draw attention to its own canonical deviancy.

2 The Theory and Theater of Cruelty

Antonin Artaud, the high priest of the theatrical avant-garde in the 1930s whose formulation of a ‘theater of cruelty’ gave vital impulses to the theory and practice of performance in the latter half of the twentieth century, was so

7 Indeed, Schiesaro (2003: 247) remarks “that it would be possible to adopt [Brecht’s] description of the effects of epic theatre on the public and apply it to Senecan tragedy.”

8 Sam Shepard 2013.

impressed by what he heard as “the transparent surge of the forces of chaos” in Seneca’s texts that he proposed a series of (never realized) public readings and a production of *Thyestes* he entitled *Le Supplice de Tantale*. He wrote in a letter to his friend Jean Paulhan in 1932 that he thought of Seneca as “the greatest tragic writer in history,” remarking that “there is no better *written* example of what can be meant by cruelty in the theater than *all* the Tragedies of Seneca.”⁹ This was certainly an eccentric view at a time when Jean Racine’s *Phèdre*, not Seneca’s *Phaedra*, was still seen as the watermark for tragedy in France,¹⁰ but in Artaud’s gnostic musings ‘cruelty’ meant not simply stage violence and bloodshed but a different metaphysics of the theater in which the spectator’s dream world, his hidden obsessions and fantasies, would pour forth upon the stage in a new language of *mise-en-scène*, blasting away a bankrupt aesthetics of realism and mere psychology. For Artaud, this project of a theater that connected deeply to an inexpressible primal scene—a theater existing “only on a level that is not yet human”—was literally prefigured by the “monsters” of Senecan drama (he refers in particular to *Thyestes*) who are “wicked as only blind forces can be.”¹¹

Artaud not only privileged a new type of total performance but was at the vanguard of a new mode of theatrical creation in which, he projected, “the old duality between author and director will disappear”¹² to be replaced by a kind of scenic *auteur*. In many European countries, and to a lesser extent in the Anglo-American realm, this so-called ‘director’s theater’ (‘Regietheater’ in German) was triumphant in the latter half of the twentieth century, and with it a certain conceptual boldness and independence from the text as written. Such directorial freedom has made Seneca’s plays, which often present textual resistances to staging, comparatively more accessible, even attractive, to the theater. For example, a recent production of Seneca’s *Phaedra* in a version by Flemish writer Hugo Claus¹³ by the Dutch troupe Utrechtse Spelen under direction of its artistic director Thibaud Delpout was touring Holland as of this writing (January 2015). The production has been described as using compelling “cinematic” elements—Theseus and Phaedra inhabit a symbolic

9 Artaud 1988: 307.

10 Apparently, it was shared by Artaud’s countryman, the devout writer of poetic drama Paul Claudel, who remarked to the novelist Franz Werfel that “Seneca was to all intents the greatest dramatist he knew” (qtd. in Lefèvre 1978: 229).

11 Artaud 1988: 307.

12 Ibid., 246.

13 Claus’s translations of *Thyestes* (1966), *Oedipus* (1971), and *Phaedra* (1980) have been quite widely produced in Holland and Belgium.

glass house on stage while Hippolytus roams freely through a contemporary stage space.¹⁴ The contemporary stage routinely favors narrative discontinuities and ruptures and the texts which allow for them or even demand them, and it can easily bring a palette of scenic technologies to bear on productions of Seneca (including, most recently, virtual and digital effects and complex sound design)¹⁵ which renders the problems posed by the theatrical literalism of overt bloodshed or multiple dramatic locations much less intractable.¹⁶

3 Peter Brook and Richard Schechner

This new relevance of Seneca was put to the test in a series of landmark productions in the 1960s and 1970s. The first was a 1967 *Médée* at the Odéon Theater in Paris, directed by Jean-Lois Barrault, in Jean Vauthier's "beautifully unfaithful" adaptation, as one critic put it.¹⁷ Both Barrault and Vauthier came to Seneca via Artaud (whose idea of a total, engulfing theater they tried to emulate) as well as via their admiration for the Elizabethans. But it was Peter Brook, who was to become one of the twentieth century's signature directors, and whose "visionary and harrowing"¹⁸ *Oedipus* the following year brought Seneca back to theatrical consciousness with a production that almost rent asunder the fledgling company of London's National Theater. Brook's reputation as an *enfant terrible* then rested on a series of remarkable experimental productions, including his searing staging of Peter Weiss's *Marat/Sade* at the Royal Shakespeare Company (1964), a deliberate attempt to validate Artaudian concepts of 'cruelty,' and the collaboratively generated, 'happenings'-influenced anti-Vietnam spectacle *US* (1966).¹⁹ Though he had some experience with classical texts, including a startlingly original version of Shakespeare's most 'Senecan' play, *Titus Andronicus* (1955), famed for its abstract and evocative depiction of violence, this *Oedipus*

14 Mieke Zijlmans 2015.

15 This tendency has been characterized by Hans-Thies Lehmann (2006: 68–107) with the much-discussed *portmanteau* term "postdramatic theatre" which includes, among other elements, a foregrounding of ceremony and ritual, a refusal of synthesis, an emphasis on dreamlike images, a diminishing role of dramatic text, and a more pronounced visual and spatial dramaturgy.

16 Dana Ferrin Sutton (1986: 63–70) discusses these inherent theatrical challenges posed by Seneca's plays.

17 French classicist Florence Dupont, quoted by Archives de France 2010.

18 Simon Callow 1997: 20.

19 Brook borrowed features such as spontaneity, discontinuity, and direct audience address from the 1960s art form of the 'happening.'

was his first foray into antiquity. Seneca was chosen over Sophocles because of what Brook perceived as his “alarmingly modern aesthetic”²⁰ but he was unhappy with the pedestrian translation that the National Theater had commissioned from David Anthony Turner. English poet Ted Hughes (a follower of T.S. Eliot) was engaged to revise it but instead produced a wholly original new version in what Anthony J. Boyle has described as “a disjunctive, asyndetic style, defined by short, hard phrases, incantatory (sometimes antiphonal) repetition, and clipped, staccato resonance.”²¹ Oedipus’s final lines, in Hughes version (1972: 90), read:

pestilence ulcerous agony blasting consumption
 plague terror plague blackness despair
 welcome come with me you are my guides
 lead me

Hughes’s approach was quite free, omitting many passages but charging existing ones with fresh poetic imagery, and enlarging the role of Iocasta, who is given a remarkable premonitory speech in the first act.²² In fact, Hughes saw the work in terms similar to Artaud’s, as “an expression of elemental and primeval cruelty” in which the protagonists are “only Greek by convention.”²³ Hughes’s incantatory style served Peter Brook’s search for a way into the text that would strip it of all easy psychologizing, even of individuality, and would arrive at a rigorous form that could reveal the essence of the myth. Of his actors, he demanded an almost paradoxical feat: that they simultaneously perform with theatrical presence and mythical distance: “Distance is a commitment to the total meaning; presence is a total commitment to the living moment:

²⁰ Quoted in Boyle 2011: cxiv.

²¹ Ibid., cxiv–cxv.

²² Subsequently, the Ted Hughes version has become an almost canonical adaptation of Seneca’s play; there have been well-regarded productions of it at the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1988 (dir. Donald Sumpter; John Shrapnel as Oedipus), at the Sydney Theatre Company in 2000 dir. Barrie Kosky; Robert Menzies as Oedipus), and at many smaller theaters. In 1983, the BBC broadcast a radio version. One of the most unusual recent productions was staged by the Theater by the Blind at New York’s Mint Theater in 2005 (dir. Ike Shamberlan) featuring a sightless actor, George Ashiotis, as Oedipus. Ashiotis was originally reluctant to take on the role because Seneca seemed to suggest that blindness is a punishment “worse than death,” but relented when he realized that *Oedipus* is principally a play about “an acceptance of one’s fate.” See Dinitia Smith, “Theater by the Blind Fashions Its ‘Oedipus’” *New York Times* 11 June 2005: B14.

²³ Williams 1988: 116.

the two go together.”²⁴ In this sense, Brook used *Oedipus* as a test case for an entire strain of modern performance influenced by the Polish theater director Jerzy Grotowski which sought a renewed authenticity and a return to the ritual wellsprings of acting in the past.

In 1968, the National company, under the aegis of its co-founder Sir Laurence Olivier, was comprised of such eminent British actors as John Gielgud (who played Oedipus), Irene Worth (Iocasta), Colin Blakely (Creon), and Ronald Pickup (Messenger), all of whom were accustomed to a theatrical culture that was stringent, text-centered, and polite. Brook by contrast, in an arduous and often exasperating ten-week rehearsal period, went deeply into what many of his actors perceived as difficult psycho-physical territory in a bid to find a balance between structure and creative freedom, a blend of ceremonial sensibility and performative expressiveness. He drew on sonic experiments and rhythmical tribal chanting, Japanese *nō* theater and tai chi, Maori *haka* war dances, jazz drumming, mask exercises, and evocative imagery from Francisco Goya etchings to Vietnam war photos in order to elicit performances of unprecedented intensity from both chorus and named actors.²⁵ The chorus of thirty-six was positioned around the auditorium as well as to the sides of the stage, allowing it, for instance, to create a cascading soundscape that suggested the fall of Icarus in the choral ode of act four.

Although many of the actors struggled with Brook's direction—Ronald Pickup was told to think of himself as a gargoyle from a Gothic cathedral and to deliver his messenger speech as if sludging through blood; John Gielgud felt the piece was “almost impossible to play well,” dreaded the direct contact with the audience, and concluded that *Oedipus* “was one of the most difficult things I have ever done in my life”²⁶—the production succeeded in summoning theatrical images of consummate power and horror. The stage action was often evocatively stylized rather than naturalistic. The set design was reduced to a large metal cube center stage, rotating as the play opened and throwing blinding gleams of light into the audience, as if to represent some alien sun. Eventually, its sides descended like drawbridges that became ramps, revealing an inner, empty core. As Oedipus, Gielgud simply put two black patches over his eyes to indicate his self-blinding; Irene Worth, as Iocasta, committed suicide by impaling herself on a golden spike through her womb (though in reality at some distance), in reviewer Martin Esslin's eyes “a terrifying, but unforgettably

24 Brook in Hughes 1972: 9.

25 See the detailed description of Brook's rehearsal process in Albert Hunt and Geoffrey Reeves 1995: 123–131. Reeves served as Brook's associate director for the production.

26 Both actors are quoted in Hunt and Reeves 1995: 134–5.

archetypal, image.”²⁷ Brook’s most ardently debated and controversial decision was the ending, for which he sought a kind of ritual release that would bring the audience back to the present. He staged an orgiastic bacchanalian dance with the cast arrayed in satyr costumes around a large golden phallus to the tune of the 1920s jazz hit “Yes, We Have No Bananas.” In a now mythic five-hour whiskey-fueled debate, National Theater director Laurence Olivier tried to dissuade Brook from his phallic coda, to no avail.²⁸ Glasses were smashed and egos bruised. Olivier later remembered this fracas as “the punch that started my undoing” (quoted in Callow 1997, 20).

Perceptive critics such as Martin Esslin understood that Brook’s Senecan experiment was successful, not because it served to upgrade Seneca’s literary or theatrical reputation—Esslin frankly thought of him as “a far worse dramatist” than Sophocles “and an infinitely inferior poet” to the latter—but because in the age of pop art and ‘theater of cruelty’ Seneca seemed “more immediately relevant” (quoted in Williams 1988, 120) and his raw and primitive sense of humanity more in tune with the fusion of Artaud, Brecht, and the ‘happenings’ Brook appeared to be aiming for. But while he conceded that the production, on the whole, was “brilliantly done,” Esslin (quoted in Williams 1988, 122) remarked that a truly ritualistic or sacred experience was finally inaccessible to a skeptical modern audience, that the audience response remained ineluctably *aesthetic*:

It still has the power to stir the emotions—but merely the emotion of embarrassment—because its terrors, its greatness, its metaphysical significance have been repressed in an age of shallow emotions and mechanized pleasures.

As Jerzy Grotowski (1968, 23), Brook’s great influence, had observed, group identification with myth had become all but an impossibility in the modern world, yet it was still possible to *confront* ourselves with myth: “[W]e can attempt to incarnate myth, putting on its ill-fitting skin to perceive the relativity of our problems, their connection to the ‘roots,’ and the relativity of the ‘roots’ in the light of today’s experience.”

²⁷ Esslin’s review from *Plays and Players* is reprinted in Williams 1988: 120–1.

²⁸ The original intention was to have an inflatable phallus (which was mysteriously stolen from the theater before opening) and a grotesque rendition of “God Save the Queen” (which was vetoed by Laurence Olivier). On the conflict between Brook and Olivier, see Daniel Rosenthal 2014: 100–106.

Brook's erstwhile collaborator Charles Marowitz, in a review in the *Village Voice* (quoted in Williams 1988, 124), was much more scathing in his assessment, accusing Brook of overemphasizing his directorial ingenuity, and sundry devices borrowed from the current *avant-garde* theater, to the detriment of the text: "It is often a fascinating experiment in pure formalism; it is rarely the outward expression of the play's inner meaning." Devastatingly, Marowitz (quoted in Williams 1988: 124) accused Brook of using Seneca in the service of theatrical pretensions that were essentially shock tactics, and thus thoroughly bourgeois: "Brook is like the liaison between the true avant-garde and the bourgeois public and critics." Others were sometimes baffled, sometimes grudgingly admiring of Brook's virtuosic achievement. But at the very least, they conceded, he was successful, in the form of Ted Hughes's muscular and evocative text, in reinjecting Seneca into the modern theater.

Less than a decade later another guru of the theatrical avant-garde, again using Hughes's seminal adaptation, produced another Senecan *Oedipus*, though in a style much less formal, and to markedly less acclaim. In the confined, almost claustrophobic venue of his Performance Group on New York's Wooster Street, director Richard Schechner staged *Oedipus* in December of 1977 on a circular set that resembled a miniature Colosseum, or an operating theater. Over the preceding decade, Schechner had come to note with a string of provocative productions inspired, like Brook's, by the improvisational practices of the Living Theater, the 'poor theater' theories of Polish director Jerzy Grotowski, as well as group therapy and 'happenings.' Schechner's credo was summed up in his "6 Axioms for Environmental Theater," published in *The Drama Review* in 1968. 'Environmental theater' disavows strict divisions between performance space and audience space, performer and non-performer, text and non-text, life and art. It is fluid and multi-focal. The test case for this approach was his 1968 production of *The Bacchae*, recast as *Dionysus in '69*, which had achieved considerable notoriety for its loose, sometimes improvisatory use of Euripides's text, the blurring of actor/character boundary (including sometimes savagely *ad hominem* ritual humiliations of the Pentheus-actor), liberal use of nudity, and (widely misreported and sensationalized) sexual encounters between performers and audience.²⁹ While this would seem to contradict the inbuilt rigidity of classical plays like Seneca's, Schechner's intent was to give the play a rougher, more atavistic treatment.

Where Brook had rendered *Oedipus* in elegant, static, coolly abstract tonalities with an almost operatic attention to language, Schechner's version was a gritty excavation of its theatrical subconscious. To this end, the stage floor was

29 On Schechner's early work and theories, see Theodore Shank 1982: 93–103.

covered with tons of dirt several feet deep, allowing the actors at moments to literally burrow into the ground. The confined environment of the set, created by Jim Clayburgh, trapped the audience within uncomfortable proximity of the action. A single light, mounted on a moving track and symbolizing the progress of the sun in real time, illuminated the action. Schechner had plaster casts of the actors' faces buried in the dirt, reflecting his conviction that the play is about the uncovering and bringing to light of unspeakable, inconceivable horrors. To give the aleatory element of Schechner's theater its due, Stephen Borst, playing the title role, had been instructed to flee the stage if he could, but he was prevented by a burly guard (John Holmes) and thrust back into the ring, manifesting in a rather literal way the inescapability of his fate. Jocasta's (Joan MacIntosh) suicide—in contrast to Brook's symbolic impalement—embraced the messiness of Seneca's physicality by spilling amniotic fluid into a dirty puddle on the ground.³⁰ Schechner's reading of *Oedipus* was essentially psychoanalytic; he conceived of the character as “a good son, a good king”³¹ confronted by a fate that signified the return of the repressed—the myth as an allegory of cultural neurosis.

Critics were generally not impressed. Writing in the *New York Times*, Gerald Rabkin called the production “a ragged affair that intermittently begins to be absorbing or moving and then undercuts itself.” He complained that Schechner seemed “uninterested in language” and that the protagonists spoke Hughes's text with little care or regard for intelligibility; especially Borst's “underlying urban whine” was singled out for opprobrium. Absent the structuring force of the words, the production was reduced to “intelligent pieces on a checkerboard.”³² It would be the last project Schechner realized with the Performance Group.

4 Textual Responses: Translation and Adaptation

Beginning in the 1970s and 1980s, a series of playwrights returned to a consideration of classical play texts as a way to harness the power of ancient myths for the reflection and analysis of current social and moral questions. Again, the Senecan DNA is sometimes explicit and intentional, sometimes only implied. British actor, director, and playwright Steven Berkoff found the story of *Oedipus* sufficiently compelling to delve into it twice—once with a

30 The description here is taken in part from Amy S. Green 1994: 52–58.

31 Green 1994: 56.

32 Gerald Rabkin, “Love Gone Awry,” *New York Times*, 8 December 1977: C 19.

straightforward adaptation of the Sophoclean text based on E.F. Watling's translation (2000, 153–218),³³ and once in the form of an overtly contemporary riff called *Greek* in which the protagonist Eddy is a young, foul-mouthed working-class hero from north London growing up in the anomie of the Thatcher era who slays his father (a café manager) with mere fighting words and marries a slutty waitress who turns out to be his mother.

"*Greek* came to me via Sophocles," Berkoff (1994a, 97) writes, "trickling its way down the millennia until it reached the unimaginable wastelands of Tufnell Park." Although his stated reference text is Greek, Berkoff's vision of the world in which *Greek* (1980) is set more closely resembles Neronian Rome: "The violence that streamed through the streets, like an all-pervading effluence (...), the killing and maiming at public sports, plus the casual slaughtering of political opponents in Northern Ireland, bespoke a society in which an emotional plague had taken root" (ibid.). Berkoff's intense and unsparing language, too, recalls Seneca, although at the conclusion of the play, Eddy refuses stoically to accede to his fate and his punishment and in fact defiantly embraces his incestuous feelings for his mother (138):

Why should I tear my eyes out Greek style, why should you hang yourself/
have you seen a child from a mother and a son / no. Have I? No. Then how
do we know that it's bad / should I be so mortified? Who me. With my
nails and fingers plunge in and scoop out those warm and tender balls of
jelly quivering dipped in blood. (...) Darkness falls. Bollocks to all that.

Berkoff (1994b, 178) wrote that with *Greek* he had not only "taken a sharp knife and plunged it into the swollen carcass of Britain" but also proposed a solution through the "curative" of (albeit incestuous) love. Some critics such as Robert Cross (2004, 162), however, read Eddy's rejection of Oedipal destiny as a call to self-reliance that, in the guise of taking Thatcher's England to task, in fact promoted its social and economic values: "*Greek* is a discourse of self-empowerment very much in tune with Thatcherite orthodoxy." While I find this interpretation difficult to reconcile with Berkoff's politics, it is clear that, like Seneca's, Berkoff's plays respond to a historical moment of radical breach and contradiction.

33 Boyle (2011, cxiii) remarks, "the opening choral ode is Senecan, not Sophoclean, in the physiological focus of its description of the plague. Berkoff's concept of fate, god, and nature (...) is also Senecan."

By 1994, when noted British playwright Caryl Churchill turned to Seneca's *Thyestes* (1998, 293–344), the dismal Thatcher years had given way to far greater geopolitical ruptures after the dissolution of the Soviet empire. The supposed triumph of neoliberal ideology and the 'End of History' (Francis Fukuyama) created an atmosphere charged with both euphoric and apocalyptic notions. The violence over the breakup of the former Yugoslavia, genocide and 'ethnic cleansing' in Rwanda, and ongoing IRA terrorism prompted Churchill (*ibid.*, 295 and 301) to write that Seneca's drama of revenge "all felt oddly topical": "I don't think it's just because I've been translating *Thyestes* (sic) that the news seems full of revenge stories." Reading Seneca's text with the help of her school Latin against the existing Renaissance translation by Jasper Heywood and the 1912 Loeb version, Churchill (296) found herself wanting to create a rendering of Seneca's text that was both faithful and contemporary, finding him, to her surprise, to be "far blunter, faster and subtler than I'd thought." As Elin Diamond notes astutely in her discussion of the adaptation, Churchill's language sheds the archaisms of the old Loeb translation and eschews the complications still present in John Fitch's 2004 new Loeb version. The first line of Tantalus's opening speech thus reads (303):

Who's dragging me
grabbing avidly
up
from the unlucky underworld?

The terse and urgent language, with its isolated "up," "tells the actor to emphasize the act of moving" (Diamond 2009, 138). As a consummate and experienced professional of the theater, Caryl Churchill managed to strip away the rhetorical accretions and philological complications embedded in the existing translations and pay attention to the gestural qualities and performative prompts contained in the language, in effect liberating the text's theatrical potential, akin to what Ted Hughes had accomplished with *Oedipus*. Aligning her version's lean and robust, sometimes even colloquial, language with Seneca's cosmology gave Churchill "rein to explore the spatial simultaneity of contemporary terrorism" (*ibid.*). Indeed, Elin Diamond (2014, 751–60) argues elsewhere that Churchill borrows Seneca's hyperbolic bleakness, in which animate nature attains a kind of moral force to signal its revulsion with the enormity of Atreus's crime, as a trope of "tragic materialism" that opens it up to a sense of "posthuman tragedy." At a time when the notion of man-made climate change was coming to the fore of public consciousness, Seneca's world-view in

Thyestes mirrored the sense of a cosmic revolt against human arrogance and indifference.

Churchill's translation was first staged in June 1994 at the Royal Court Theater in London under the direction of James Macdonald in a production that was, in critic Paul Taylor's words (1994, 25), "keen to stress the brutality of the piece, suggesting that *Thyestes* is the ancestor not just of *Hamlet* but of films like [Quentin Tarantino's] *Reservoir Dogs*." Using the affordances of 'Regietheater,' Macdonald deliberately underplayed the heated rhetoric of the source and deployed video cameras and monitors that kept the main action offstage, as if in an ironic nod to Greek stage convention, while summoning associations with surveillance and voyeurism. Disturbing sounds of crashing metals and pouring liquids punctuated the action, adding to the sense of menace and disorientation. The use of electronic media highlighted the idea that at the core of Seneca's play is an act of pitiless observation—Atreus making, as it were, a visual meal out of Thyestes's anguish—but also the affective failure of that observation to sate a hyperbolic, self-consuming appetite for revenge. "Even this is too little for me," Atreus laments, "my anger was cheated/ because I hurried" (Churchill 1998, 342). For Taylor (1994, 25), it was this conflation of "deepest tragedy" with "blackest comedy" that set the play's tone: "With boundless perverted desire bumping haplessly against the limits of logic, the play imparts a strong sense of the futility of violent revenge . . ." Several British critics agreed with Taylor's positive assessment both of Churchill's translation and of the production; Michael Coveney in *The Observer* thought that "a reasonable case for [Seneca's] dramaturgical significance" had been made, and John Goss of the *Sunday Telegraph* found disturbing traces of the "real world" beyond the literary fantasies, reminiscent of "the latest report from Rwanda" (quoted in Peter J. Davis 2003, 35). However, as Davis points out, academic critics were less willing to take the stage production at face value, convinced that "it's not actually a terribly good play" (so Anthony Keen in *Didaskalia*) and that it is "staggeringly inert, verbose, unsuggestive of stage action" (Edith Hall in *TLS*)—judgments that revealed perhaps more about the reviewers' preoccupations than about the production at hand.³⁴

An American production of Churchill's version of *Thyestes* at the Court Theater in Chicago in 2007 was, in reviewer James M. Brandon's (2008, 312–314) opinion, "largely a successful enterprise," even though he, too, laid its shortcomings partly at the feet of Seneca's play. Director JoAnne Akalaitis managed a "bold and innovative interpretation [that] was also alienating and cold"

34 Davis 2003, 34.

(ibid., 312). As is her wont, Akalaitis took a number of liberties with the text and its staging. The set and costumes were a pastiche of ancient and modern, as was the language: on some occasions, actors delivered their lines in the original Latin, which was simultaneously translated by Tantalus and Fury. Other distancing devices included, again, monitors and video montages, as if Seneca is now imaginable or performable only in a mediatized landscape. Yet what Brandon considered the production's most effective moment still came down to language and performance: the extended messenger speech of the sons' murder was played synchronously with Thyestes (James Krag) gorging himself noisily on chunks of meat. The audience was, in Brandon's (ibid., 313) words, "squirming in their seats, writhing in a kind of cathartic reaction to the horror of Atreus's actions."

Sarah Kane, a young playwright concerned with creating a theater "of extreme mental discomfort and distress" (quoted in Graham Saunders 2003, 99), who was thus duly impressed with Churchill's *Thyestes*, touched off a firestorm in the UK with the debut of her own play *Blasted* (1995), a searing and grotesquely violent exploration of sexual power and politics set in the midst of an unnamed civil war. The unsparing theatrical voice of *Blasted*, which Charles Spencer called "a nauseating dog's breakfast" (quoted in Saunders 2003, 97), had earned Kane the admiration of established playwrights such as Churchill, Edward Bond, and Harold Pinter and had marked her as the most neo-Artaudian writer of her generation. That Kane's work, like *Thyestes*, was first produced at the Royal Court Theater under James Macdonald's direction, also made her a 'Senecan' playwright at least by association. In 1996, London's Gate Theatre commissioned Kane to write a play based on a canonical text of the past, and, after considering both Georg Büchner's *Woyzeck* and Bertolt Brecht's *Baal*, she settled on Seneca's *Phaedra*. Even though she found the play "interesting" on first reading (in spite of her earlier misapprehension that in Greco-Roman drama "[e]verything happens offstage, and what's the point?"), Kane decided to make her own play an autonomous creation (Saunders 2002, 72). The resulting text, *Phaedra's Love*, clearly reveals intertextual traces from antiquity through the Renaissance to Brecht and Camus, but it transplants the narrative of a stepmother's tragic passions to a thoroughly contemporary environment of political paralysis and social and moral decay, partly galvanized by the hostility of parts of the British public towards their royalty. In the words of Stefani Brusberg-Kiermeier (2001, 165), "Kane's *Phaedra's Love* can be described as (1) a post-modern re-write (2) in an Elizabethan light (3) of a Roman re-write (4) of a Greek play."

In contrast to Seneca, and more in line with Racine (whose version she claimed not to have read), Kane puts not Phaedra but Hippolytus at the epicenter of her drama. A young prince of Troezen in whom disaffection has risen to

pathology, Hippolytus is not the icy asexual of the classical model but a kind of worst-case Hamlet: slovenly, distant, abrasive, given to gluttony, television, and affectless sex. He is literally 'Phaedra's love,' i.e., the actual but elusive object of her desiring, which is also, fatally, its own self-devouring object. "Can't switch this off. Can't crush it. Can't. Wake up with it, burning me. Think I'll crack open I want him so much," Phaedra dejectedly tells her daughter Strophe (Kane 1996, 67). Hippolytus's cutting wit and total disregard for social mores paradoxically make him popular; the more he exploits and abuses the people in his orbit the more powerfully they are drawn to him. In one scene, Hippolytus allows Phaedra to perform oral sex on him as a "birthday present," then casually informs her that he has gonorrhea. When Phaedra later commits suicide (ironically, for a play that so revels in the direct display of savagery, offstage) and accuses Hippolytus of rape, he is delighted by the turn of events which he perceives as the ultimate evidence of Phaedra's love for him. Rather than deny the rape, he embraces it as a gift: "Not many people get a chance like this. This isn't tat. This isn't bric-a-brac. . . . She died doing this for me. I'm doomed" (ibid., 85). Eventually, Hippolytus is jailed and then tried; outside the court, he hurls himself into the waiting mob where he is strangled, castrated in the most graphic fashion, and finally disemboweled by his own father, Theseus, to the approving braying of the throng. Theseus, meanwhile, has also publicly raped and killed the disguised Strophe, and when he realizes his error, he slashes his own throat. As vultures descend on the dying Hippolytus he exclaims, with a smile: "If there could have been more moments like this" (97). Refusing an easy catharsis, Kane's over-the-top violence shades into comedy (reminding one critic of Monty Python),³⁵ and indeed she struggled with the most demonstrably 'Senecan' aspect of the production when she directed *Phaedra's Love* at the Gate Theatre in 1996. Opting for the most realistic representation imaginable of the play's savagery, Kane reported that she and her actors were "all severely traumatized" and one walked out after a particularly bloody rehearsal. Still, she subjected her audience to an almost unbearable spectacle of sensory immersion, with the angry mob emerging from the auditorium itself and severed body parts flying over the heads of the spectators.³⁶

The Senecan quality of Kane's play is not found in direct borrowings or echoes—in fact, no scene in *Phaedra's Love* corresponds directly to Seneca's *Phaedra*—or even in the insistent overttness of the on-stage violence, but rather in the way in which Hippolytus as a character seems to represent a consequent and radical perversion of the Stoic ideal of *voluntas* (free will) as

35 Brusberg-Kiermeier 2001: 169.

36 Saunders 2002: 80–81.

an absolute will-to-truth.³⁷ Within the inverted moral landscape of *Phaedra's Love*, this purely self-loathing, deliberately self-destructive prince whose path to reclaiming his humanity is even more convoluted than that of the eponymous heroine, becomes almost heroic. In the open embrace of his utter corruption, Kane said, "Hippolytus is for me an ideal" (quoted in Saunders 2002, 79).³⁸

Among the most complex modern literary responses to Seneca, and in particular to his *Medea*, is the work of playwright Heiner Müller. An East German writer frequently at odds with the regime of his home country, Müller, who died in 1995, is generally acknowledged to have been the most significant political playwright after Brecht. Allusions to and appropriations of the classical canon of mythology and drama, often in fragmentary and highly evocative form, litter Müller's work from the 1950s to the 1990s. For Müller, both the narratives of Greek and Roman mythology and their reception by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century classical German writers and philologists (e.g., Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Theodor Mommsen, and Friedrich Nietzsche) provided a lens through which he was able to cast a jaundiced eye on the self-mythologizing of the East German state. Seneca played a key role for Müller, who wrote a lengthy poem about the former's death-as-performance. In a conversation with friend and filmmaker Alexander Kluge, he sketched a portrait of Seneca that could easily be read as a self-portrait. "I believe Seneca had a cynical relation to power," Müller (2001, 164) said, and, referring to a bust of the Roman writer, described him "as someone you would characterize as decadent and morbid, more the type of a bonvivant who likes to indulge himself." To him, Seneca's fraught relationship with Nero and his involuntary death became a touchstone of the ambivalent association of German intellectuals (including himself) with power: "[Seneca's death] was always a topic of German literature in the eighteenth century, at a time when the illusion of an education of princes still existed but was already losing its hold: the effort of intellectuals to meddle with politics and exert an influence and, at the same time, their disillusionment" (ibid., 167).

It is within the context of the questioning of power (and gender) relationships that Müller employed a 'Senecan' dramaturgy, although once again an unambiguous connection to Seneca's texts is difficult to establish. A short

37 Bruserg-Kiermeier (2001: 171) sees in the play a "very personal appropriation of Seneca's stoicism."

38 Hippolytus was clearly a kind of literary surrogate for Kane, who, like her character, suffered from a severe depression leavened only by a mordant sense of irony, and who also committed suicide, in 1999.

wordless drama from 1974 called *Medeaplay* compresses the Medea story to a pantomimic enactment of the most rudimentary relationship between the sexes: marriage, sex, birth—culminating in the woman's violent revenge on the man who meanwhile is encumbered by weaponry heaped upon him: "The woman takes off her face, rips up the child, and hurls the parts in the direction of the man. Debris, limbs, intestines fall from the flies on the man" (Müller 1984, 47). Müller suggests an archetypal action in which the story of Medea and Jason is only the specific manifestation of an underlying, trans-historical, mutually reinforcing pattern of gendered violence and militarism which, as Sue-Ellen Case (2003, 257) writes, "is caused by the sexual practice of oppression and the organized violence of the patriarchal state."³⁹ In his *DESPOILED SHORE MEDEAMATERIAL LANDSCAPE WITH ARGONAUTS* (1983), Müller takes up the Medea myth again, centering on a ferocious monologue by Medea (Müller 1984, 124–135).⁴⁰ Medea appears as an implacable force exacting revenge for Jason's betrayal: "You owe me a brother Jason" (ibid., 129). Müller purges the character of all the false contrition and moral hesitation that can be found in Euripides and Seneca; when her sons don't laugh with her at the "comedy" of Creusa's murder and show fear at their mother's machinations, she contemptuously calls them "actors" and "traitors" and dispatches them in a mad rush (132).⁴¹ Her defiant, almost triumphal, refusal of the trappings of Jason's "civilized" world which she has traded for her own "barbarian" nature—in Müller's drama also a comment on imperialism and Western cultural hubris—make her yearn for a state not just "unsexed," like Lady Macbeth, but beyond the realm of gender and power altogether: "I want to break mankind apart in two / And live within the empty middle I / No woman and no man" (132). This seeming self-abnegation, which is in truth a negation of the entire dualism and dialectic of human culture and history, is contrasted by Medea's most 'Senecan' feature, her ruthless 'Nietzschean' self-affirmation, "O I am wise I am Medea I" (133), which echoes the line of Seneca's Medea, "Medea nunc sum; crevit ingenium malis" (Now I am Medea; my wisdom has grown through suffering, 910).⁴² Case (2003, 259) notes that Medea's monologue "is one of the longest, most poetic, and most dangerous speeches Müller ever wrote for a woman." The text

39 All translations from Case are my own.

40 Boyle (2014: cxxxviii) also considers the monologue to be "strongly Senecan."

41 The action of killing the children is only implied in the speech by Medea's own reaction to her deed. In this sense, Müller emulates the nature of the ancient texts where, in the absence of stage directions, action becomes speech.

42 The suggestion of a 'Nietzschean' quality is made by Denis Henry and B. Walker (1967: 177).

is a sustained expression of the fundamental emancipatory process of Medea, who posits an autonomous identity for herself not only beyond the confines of gender norms and the compulsion of procreation and dynastic succession, but also outside of the coercive historical subjectivity embodied by Jason. In that sense, Müller's use of Senecan patterns of radical subversion of the patriarchy also resonate as a call to political revolt, although in the phantasmagoric third part of the text, *LANDSCAPE WITH ARGONAUTS*, the unnamed speaker who is presumably a composite of Jason and Müller himself, appears suspended in an never-ending cycle of male destructiveness in which the past repeats itself: "The youth of today ghosts of / The dead of a war that is to happen tomorrow / YET WHAT REMAINS IS CREATED BY BOMBS" (Müller 134).

Seneca's drama has proven remarkably adaptable to shifting historical circumstances and theatrical fashions; his dramatic voice seems to be in the mix from the epistemic ruptures of the Renaissance to the competing paradigms of the present moment. The productions of Brook and Schechner and the texts of Churchill, Kane, and Müller, as well as other recent and current scenic and textual approaches to Seneca's work, remind us that he is a perennial contemporary and that his drama is like a cracked mirror in which almost any unsettled age finds its reflection. As Boyle (2014, cxvi) remarks, "[T]he relevance of Seneca's tragic vision to the occlusions of postmodernity seems unlikely to terminate soon."

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Rereading Seneca: The Twenty-First Century and Beyond

Siobhán McElduff

Senecan tragedy is violent. If the reports of Hippolytus's end are horrible in Euripides's *Phaëdra*, Seneca takes it one step further: in his *Phaëdra*, Hippolytus is dragged by his maddened horses in a flight only temporarily stopped when the sharpened stump of a tree skewers him through the groin.¹ After this, the horses pull free the body, or what is left of it, and do even more damage: in the concluding scenes of the play his mourning father is reduced to trying to assemble his body out of indistinguishable body parts in a gruesome jigsaw puzzle.²

In NBC's critically acclaimed,³ but low rated and recently cancelled, *Hannibal* (2013–15)⁴ the eponymous cannibalistic serial killer violently

* I would like to thank Susanna Braund for her immense help with this report, as well as the insightful comments from the editor and the anonymous reader. All errors that remain are my own.

- 1 The entire scene, especially lines 1085–1104, is extremely graphic, describing in rather loving detail the way Hippolytus's blood is splattered across the countryside, along with various parts of his corpse. Given that Seneca's audience was familiar with chariot crashes and the senatorial class had the right to the best seats at the circus, even if they didn't always choose to sit there, one suspects a scene like this deliberately triggered strong memories on the part of some readers, as not all the elite took the disdainful attitude of Pliny the Younger (*Epistles* 9.6; notice everyone else is at the races). In other words, although the violence of Hippolytus's death is filtered through a messenger speech, the speech vividly and deliberately recalls the type of carnage that really occurred in spectacle entertainments in the Circus.
- 2 Coffey and Mayer's commentary on the *Phaëdra* is particularly scathing about this scene, calling Theseus's statement at 1267 (*quae pars tui sit dubito; sed pars est tui*, "I do not know what part of you this is, but it is a part of you"), "arguably the worst line in Senecan drama" (1990, 195).
- 3 See, for example, Ryan 2013; Willmore 2013; and Seitz 2013. There is a strong element of class at play here in the approving tone of critics: Hannibal may be a serial killer, but he is an elegant, educated and erudite one (<http://boingboing.net/2015/02/17/eat-the-rude-hannibal-lecter.html>).
- 4 The cancellation may have more to do with rights than the low ratings: in season four the producers wanted to introduce Clarice Starling, the major protagonist in the two of the Hannibal Lector movies, including *Silence of the Lambs* (1991).

murders people⁵ and then serves them up as elegant meals for his unsuspecting guests (the photography for these feasts is particularly and disturbingly beautiful), in scenes worthy of Atreus in Seneca's *Thyestes*. Unrestrained by network executives, *Dredd* (2012)⁶ used the full power of 3D to embrace the viewer in gorgeous and horrifying splatters of blood. And, even on TV, AMC's *The Walking Dead*⁷ is extremely graphic in its depictions of violence and has no problems with showing either zombies devouring bodies, or the heroes blowing out zombie brains or decapitating them. Other similarly violent series include: Fox's *The Following* (2011–15), about a hunt for an ex-academic turned serial killer; *Dexter*, a drama about another serial killer, who this time is the hero (2006–2013); *American Horror Story* in all of its four incarnations so far (*Murder House*, *Asylum*, *Coven*, and *Freak Show* (2011–15)); *Banshee* (2013–); *True Detective* (2014–);⁸ and, for those who like their sex and violence with a classical twist, Starz's *Spartacus* (2010–2013). And all of this without mentioning HBO's *Game of Thrones* (2011–), which revels in violence, gore, and (usually female) nudity as a badge of authenticity for its magical medieval-like world.

Why such a list in a chapter which seeks to address the present and future of Senecan reception? What does a list of violent US television shows and movies have to do with Senecan drama and how it is currently being read, apart from reflecting a modern interest in viewing or hearing about graphic violence in common with ancient audiences? It is here because I believe that our complex entertainment environment offers new ways to read and respond to Senecan drama and that we should embrace this opportunity: studying modern media's presentation of fictional violence can and does illuminate Senecan drama. But I will return to this topic later in this paper, after discussion of some trends in recent Senecan scholarship, translation, and performance.⁹

5 *Hannibal*'s violence resulted in its being pulled from one Salt Lake City NBC affiliate.

6 On the subject of network interference with the level of gore in his show, the producer, Bryan Fuller, said, "eye gouging, seeing people's intestines being removed from their bodies in great noodly clumps—those types of things they [NBC] tend to say no to". (<http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/hannibals-bryan-fuller-rise-horror-432241>).

7 *The Walking Dead* is the most viewed US Cable TV show, with ratings of c.15 million viewers per episode. Its success has bred a prequel, *Fear the Walking Dead* (2015–).

8 A new iteration of *True Detective* appeared in the summer of 2015; it, however, involves two new central characters and a new setting.

9 Rather than review current scholarship, translations or other media in their entirety, I will be selective in the material I mention. Those interested in a more formal and complete survey of scholarship on Senecan drama should visit the *Oxford Bibliographies Online* (<http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/>).

To begin with scholarship: one of the most accessible modes for presenting scholarship is companion volumes—like this one—which are written for both general and specialist audiences. Seneca was somewhat slow to be embraced here, but that has quickly changed: two recent published companions were specifically dedicated to him,¹⁰ with several others, including this, in preparation, indicating his still rising critical reputation. These show the increased importance of reception (itself an increasingly prominent topic in all literary companions, no matter what the topic): this volume makes that obvious, but it is clear in Blackwell's *A Companion to the Neronian Age* (2013), *Brill's Companion to Seneca* (2014), and the recent *Cambridge Companion*. In these we see that Senecan reception has become something that is presented as an integral part of our understanding of the author, reflecting Charles Martindale's comment that, "our current interpretations of ancient texts, whether or not we are aware of it, are, in complex ways, constructed by the chain of receptions through which their continued readability has been effected" (1993, 7), as all contain significant material on his reception. Senecan tragedies are read as existing on a continuum, and the influence of his works is not presented as a series of extreme disjunctures, with his drama disappearing and appearing sporadically throughout the post-classical period, but as a tradition which has built consistently upon itself.

Thus it is natural that in current scholarship Seneca is frequently presented both as a creature of our own age and its particular concerns, as well as an ancient author working in a cultural universe removed from our own. This can be seen, for example, in James Ker's *The Deaths of Seneca* (2009), which discusses the death of Seneca as various narrators have refigured it over the centuries, as well as the collection *Seneca and the Self* (2009), which begins by pointing to the effect that the works of Michel Foucault have had on the reception of Seneca, a theme picked up by a range of contributors. A Seneca has emerged who cannot be read outside of reception and whose reception is seen as affected by the previous generations who have read and reacted to his works.

Much of more traditional scholarly material, such as commentaries, is far more accessible than ever before, due to the growing practice of providing translations alongside the Latin text, enabling the work to reach an audience whose Latin may be weak or non-existent in a formal sense.¹¹ Given the

10 *Brill's Companion to Seneca: Philosopher and Dramatist* (2014) and the *Cambridge Companion to Seneca* (2015).

11 Obviously these did not just start appearing in 2002: 1994 saw Anthony Boyle's *Phaedra*; 1998 Margarethe Billerbeck's commentary on the *Hercules furens*.

number of commentaries on Senecan tragedy which have appeared over the past fourteen years, this is an important development. To give one example, the Pseudo-Senecan *Octavia*, surprisingly long-neglected (it was not until 1978 it received a short commentary by L. Y. Whitman), has been the subject both of commentaries by Rolando Ferri (2003) and Anthony Boyle (2008), and of a collection of essays edited by Marcus Wilson (2003); Boyle's *Octavia* also included a translation, opening up this juicy account of Neronian shenanigans to a wider audience. Translations in Senecan commentaries are now standard: in English, we have recently seen Harry Hine's *Medea* (2000), Anthony Boyle's *Oedipus* (2011) and *Medea* (2014); in Italian, Alfonso Traina's *Medea* (2002), Daniela Averno's *Hercules Oetaeus* (2002), Annalisa Némethi's *Medea* (2003), and Alfredo Casamento's *Phaedra* (2011). This style of commentary allows a Latinless (or Latinlite) reader to engage more fully with the Latin text and explore beyond the version presented by a translator, while potentially opening the text to a more complex and culturally situated reading even by those unfamiliar with Seneca's work or period. While not precisely a commentary, one particularly intriguing version of a Senecan text with translation, which shows how these could be used to reach wider audiences, is Durs Grünbein and Bernd Seidensticker's 2002 edition of *Thyestes*. Grünbein is an acclaimed German poet, whose translation of *Thyestes* was staged in 2001 at the Nationaltheater Mannheim (it was also the first verse translation of the play in German since the nineteenth century); this edition not only included his translation with facing Latin text, but notes for a general audience, an interview with Grünbein, and an interpretive essay by Seidensticker, all explicitly included to invite newcomers into the world of Senecan tragedy.¹²

Translation has always been a primary mode of the reception of classical works, and this is especially true for Seneca. However, for a long time, the Latinless reader had few options in English beyond Frank Miller's aggressively archaic 1917 translation for the Loeb Classical Library, a translation regrettably over-full with haths, fleeths, thous, and arts, words which few people have said even in elevated conversation for several centuries, and one which regrettably made Seneca sound like a particularly third-rate sixteenth-century dramatist (though, as it was published during a particularly low point in Seneca's reputation as a dramatic writer, perhaps that was the only way the translator and publisher felt the public would read his plays). E. F. Watling's 1966 translation for the Penguin Classics series marked a serious improvement, but still at times succumbed to the disease of archaism that can afflict even the most

12 On the contemporary popularity of the *Thyestes*, see further below.

well-intentioned translator of classical texts.¹³ That said, the five plays it included (*Thyestes*, *Phaedra*, *Oedipus*, *Troades*, and *Octavia*) were the most available of all the dramas in English translation for a long time, barring individual translations such as Ted Hughes's *Oedipus* (1968), to the almost complete exclusion of some dramas, such as *Medea* and *Hercules furens*, that enjoy significant academic interest.¹⁴

Since then, the landscape has dramatically shifted. In English, John Fitch's translations for Loeb Classical Library (2002 and 2004) led the way in quality and clarity and in the abandonment of the archaic mode of translation. Penguin issued a new translation of the dramas in 2011 by R. Scott Smith.¹⁵ Smith made the decision to translate the speeches and dialogues into elevated prose, which, while perhaps not true to Seneca's poetic meter, is closer to modern drama, and presents Seneca less as an archaic artifact than as an author with modern immediacy. The cover for the translations, with no explicitly classical image, also suggests to the reader that Seneca is very much a modern writer. The year before this, 2010, saw Emily Wilson's translations of six of the tragedies (*Oedipus*, *Medea*, *Hercules furens*, *Thyestes* and *Trojan Women*) for Oxford World Classics. Although in a range of poetic meters, her fresh, clear translation, which avoided archaisms, also presented Seneca in a modern mode.¹⁶ Forthcoming translations include those from the University of Chicago Press as part of its aim to release Seneca's complete works in translations. However, these seem the least likely of all to appeal to a nonacademic audience, especially as the covers are not exactly welcoming to this group, which is regrettable given the accessibility and vigor of the translations which have appeared

13 For example, Tantalus's speech at the start of the *Thyestes* begins: "Who hales me from my miserable rest . . . such as the keeper of hell's goal would loathe to look on, such as would affright Grim Acheron" (45). There is nothing necessarily wrong with this translation, but it has to be admitted "affright" is not a word normally found in modern speech, even in poetic speech. Nor is "hales".

14 It is telling that two of the plays contained in Watling's translation, *Thyestes* and *Phaedra*, have a particular contemporary popularity.

15 The plays translated were *Phaedra*, *Trojan Women*, *Hercules furens*, *Thyestes* and *Octavia*. *Oedipus* was dropped from the earlier Penguin, perhaps as a result of the availability and impact of Ted Hughes's adaptation.

16 The translations, however, are slightly out of sync with much recent scholarly work on Seneca in that by excluding stage directions she suggests he is not an author for the stage. Wilson's own argument is that by including such directions she "would . . . pre-empt judgment on questions of staging" (xxviii).

so far.¹⁷ New, popular translations have also appeared in French, with *Les Belles Lettres* releasing a bilingual edition with translation by Oliver Sers for their pocket classics series in 2011. The sudden expansion of the number of available and reasonably priced translations for his most popular plays means that readers encounter a range of Senecas across a number of European languages, filtered through a range of translation choices.

1 Performances of Seneca

The argument that Senecan tragedy is performable and was most likely ‘performed’¹⁸ has been one of the major thrusts of recent academic work on the drama. Dana Sutton’s groundbreaking 1986 study *Seneca and the Stage* was followed by George Harrison’s edited volume *Seneca in Performance* (2000) and Thomas Kohn’s *The Dramaturgy of Senecan Tragedy* (2013).¹⁹ The recent French Collection *Sénèque, un philosophe homme de théâtre?* (2014) also tackled the issue with essays on his performability or lack thereof (Kugelmeier), and modern staging (Klees), with others also focusing on issues in staging his work (Agyon, Paré-Rey).

Most commentaries and work on Seneca take Seneca’s stageability as a given: see, for example, Boyle’s *Oedipus* (2011) and P. J. Davis’s *Duckworth Companion to the Thyestes* (2003).²⁰ Contemporary adaptors of his work agree, even if they do not think that the original staging was very exciting to watch. When Simon Stone, the director and co-writer of a celebrated 2010 version of *Thyestes*, was asked about what the original production of the play would have looked like, he replied, “a few people facing the audiences in robes and masks speaking long soliloquies. Some swords. Some spit roast.”²¹

17 These are: Harry Hine’s translation of the *Natural Questions* (2009); Robert Kaster and Martha Nussbaum’s *Anger, Mercy, Revenge* (2010); and Miriam Griffin and Brad Inwood’s *On Benefits* (2011).

18 Whether it was fully staged, semi-staged, or recited, as opposed to being written as if for the stage, but not actually performed.

19 Most studies of Seneca are concerned with the issue of his dramaturgy to some degree—see, for example, two recent German studies: Kugelmeier (2007) and Heil (2013), which take contradictory stances on the stageability of Seneca.

20 Not all subscribe to such a view: Roland Mayer’s *Companion to Phaedra* (2002) finds serious issues in the performability of some portions of play (24–25) and downplays this factor.

21 <http://belvoir.com.au/news/an-interview-with-simon-stone/>.

2 Productions

Although we might wish that Stone had a slightly more dynamic view of the dramatic possibilities of an original staging of *Thyestes* or any Roman tragedy, his choice of play is part of a wave of recent adaptations of *Thyestes* which reflects the particularly contemporary appeal of its themes. This wave began before 2000 with Caryl Churchill's 1994 translation of the play for the Royal Court Theatre. The popular currency of *Thyestes*'s themes is shown by the number of revivals of this version: it was performed in 2007 at the Court Theatre in Chicago, with JoAnne Akalaitis as director and Jennifer Tipton as lighting designer, a high profile production which involved "three of the most accomplished female practitioners [of dramatic staging] of the twentieth century" (Brandon 2008, 312). Although some reviewers found the play unsatisfying, they blamed Seneca, rather than the direction, topic, or adaptation, for the production's failures, calling it a "mediocre tragedy" (*ibid.*, 313) and a "static speech-fest" (Oxman 2007). This production was notable for its embrace of the violence of the original and its desire to place this in a contemporary context, with one reviewer commenting on Akalaitis's ability to "shove these blood-and-guts plays into the modern consciousness without reducing their scale. Seneca penned weird, horrifying, foreign plays. Akalaitis pays homage to that, while still exploring ideas of cruelty in the modern community" (Jones 2007). In an interview before the production Akalaitis commented that, "Susan Sontag says that all evil, all horror can be assimilated by a contemporary audience. She may be right, I don't know. I think when you get involved in the murder of children and the eating of children that then you may have crossed a line. And there are kids in this production" (Almeida 2007).²² The Messenger's monologue about Thyestes's cannibalistic feast was spoken as Thyestes sat in front of the audience eating the meal—a scene that had the audience squirming (Brandon 2008, 313).

By staging such scenes a director may seek to share the trauma of violent acts with an audience, to explore whether by seeing an act we, as spectators, can share in the horror of viewing of an act of this nature.²³ The extremity

22 To emphasize the innocence of the children the performance was preceded by a video montage of Thyestes and his sons playing in a park—interspersed with images of raw meat.

23 For a further exploration of this theme in modern drama see Martin Harries's insightful *Forgetting Lot's Wife* (2007).

of the violence perpetrated and the values violated by Atreus (cannibalism)²⁴ and the nature of his victims (the children of his brother) challenges us as viewers: much as we might want to empathize with the victims of violence, we are also repelled by such sights and seek to turn away, a privilege not accorded to the victims of violence, then or now.

In her hugely influential 2009 study of horror, *Horrorism*,²⁵ Adriana Caverero argued for a new taxonomy of violence based on vulnerability and helplessness, arguing that this is necessary in an age where bodies are constantly obliterated by acts of violence and the focus of violence is not just on death but, frequently, on the most gruesome and indiscriminate form of death possible, one that leaves the corpse as an undistinguishable mass of flesh. One cannot imagine something that obliterates a victim as a human more than consuming them, and being consumed by one's unwitting parent is an especially gruesome and vicious twist. I will return to the power of the theme of consumption in the play below, but for the moment I want to stress the particularly modern topicality of *Thyestes*'s focus on not just child-murder, but child-dismemberment and transformation of Thyestes's sons into a feast for their father. Atreus revels in the confusion between father and sons after Thyestes has consumed his children, taunting Thyestes just before he reveals the boys heads saying, "trust that your sons are now in their father's embrace" (*hic esse natos crede in amplexu patris*, 946; see also 998).

To return to the production, unlike Seneca, Akalaitis provided the audience with Tantalus as a double on stage for the entire play, keeping him visibly present throughout so he could see the horrors his heirs engaged in. Tantalus and the Fury also acted as translators, as some lines were delivered in Latin, an interactive role that meant they could never be dismissed by spectators, who were forced by their speaking presence to reflect not just on the crimes they were viewing, but on Tantalus's experience of viewing these horrors enacted by his kith and kin. London's Arcola Theatre's celebrated 2009 revival of the same play (dir. Polly Findlay) also fully embraced the violence of the Latin original. One review called it a "splatterfest" (Gardner 2009), while others linked it with modern cinematic narratives of violence: *Time Out* compared it to the slasher movie genre, while *The Times* compared it with Quentin Tarantino's blood-bath *Reservoir Dogs*.²⁶ The fact that Seneca's play is "gory rather than horrific"

²⁴ Technically speaking the only cannibal is Thyestes, but Atreus is surely also a cannibal-by-proxy, if such a thing exists.

²⁵ She examines both fictional and real horror, especially in the form of suicide bombers.

²⁶ These reviews were proudly cited by 59 Productions, the team behind the production's special effects (<http://59productions.co.uk/project/thyestes>). The fact that reviewers

(Keen 1994) does not seem to be much of an issue for modern reviewers and audiences. We can see this in other productions of *Thyestes* which have also chosen to embrace and even ratchet up the gore. The Brussels based Opera Royal de la Monnaie's 2003 production of Jan van Vlijmen's opera *Thyeste*²⁷ also showed the entirety of Thyestes's revolting banquet on stage and, for added gruesomeness, included a scene where Thyestes's two sons' heads were kicked around in a bag on stage (Dunnett and Dunnett 2006, 63).

Another notably bloody version of *Thyestes* is Simon Stone's, originally staged in 2010 at the Malthouse in Melbourne. Co-written²⁸ and directed by Stone, this free adaptation detached sections of Seneca's original and inserted them within the larger story of the House of Atreus's grim record of family violence²⁹ and revenge in order to point out "the ridiculousness of revenge culture."³⁰ By explicitly positioning *Thyestes* within its mythic cycle, Stone acknowledged that for many audiences the story of Thyestes on its own does not have the full meaning that it would have had in antiquity, but only gains that when placed explicitly within the context of the full horror show of past crimes. This decision integrated Seneca's work into the mythic cycle as one critical element of an "ur-myth of unstoppable revenge cycles"³¹ rather than as a later grafting on to that story, even if Seneca is sometimes still read as an author secondary to the superior and anterior Greeks and only of importance where he adapts Greek plays now lost.³² Perhaps, however, Stone did his

turned to movie genres and examples for comparison, rather than other dramas, is telling, as it shows how contemporary audiences naturally turn in the direction of modern media for comparatives. (It is hardly likely that a reviewer for *The Times* could not think of a dramatic comparison to draw on or, if he did so, worry that his audience would not get the reference.)

27 Based on a 1966 stage drama by Hugo Claus, which in turn was based on Seneca's drama.

28 His co-writers were Thomas Henning, Chris Ryan, and Mark Winter.

29 Inherited family traumas rest at the heart of one recent TV series, *Gotham* (2014–), a prequel to Batman's life as a man with an unhealthy obsession with revenge, vigilantism, and nocturnal flying mammals. *Gotham* is not only fascinated with the early years of Batman but in the origin stories of iconic villains like Scarecrow, Penguin and the Joker, whose origins are located in childhoods that make Caligula's look normal: Scarecrow is driven insane by an injection given by his father; the Joker kills his mother as revenge for her sexual freedom; and the Penguin has an insane mother who is endearingly fluffy and disturbingly psychotic at the same time.

30 "An Ego Trip that Pushes the Boundaries": 2012 interview with the *Sydney Morning Herald* given for a revival of the original production.

31 Ibid.

32 Chris Jones's review of Akalaitis's 2007 production of the drama argued that the importance of Seneca's play lay in that it was a Roman translation without a Greek original,

work a little too well: one reviewer commented that “the *Greeks* didn’t do shadows: this is a universe of darkness visible, where the hidden is dragged into the unforgiving light” (Croggan 2010; my italics).

The wider twisted history of the House of Atreus also supplied material for La Comédie Française’s production of Florence Dupont’s translation of *Agamemnon* in 2011 (dir. Denis Marleau), a version which received enthusiastic reviews. Like other recent productions of Seneca (most of the productions of *Thyestes* listed above used video technology in their staging) it embraced technology and video projection, using it to show the visible effects of violence that occurred off-stage, such as the head of Agamemnon dripping blood. This version stripped away much of the dialogue (what we might consider the most modern and crowd-pleasing element of a Senecan tragedy) and presented a set series of speeches rather than conversations. It also emphasized the role of women by reassigning to them some of the dialogue from minor male characters such as Strophius, creatively reworking this drama as one where women above all get to speak—and be silenced, as in the case of Cassandra. Like Grünbein’s work, this attempted to reach outside the theater’s immediate audience and came with educational and promotional (press) materials posted online.

As we might guess, given this cultural moment’s taste in forms of violence, out of all of Seneca’s plays, *Thyestes* is currently the most in vogue: Hugo Claus’s 1966 translation has been revived a number of times, including in 2002 for Compagnie Point Zéro, Théâtre de la Place des Martyres (dir. Jean-Michel d’Hoop); Grünbein’s translation was directed by Laurent Chétouane for the Nationaltheater Mannheim in 2001; and the Dutch Theatergroep Azjin revived a version by Gillis Biesheuvel and Oscar van Woensel in 2012. It could be argued that, in an age in which almost anything can be viewed on YouTube or other online platforms, the House of Atreus appeals because it seems almost uniquely and modernly dysfunctional in terms of mythical families. Other families might be slaughtered by a father (*Hercules furens*) or a mother (*Medea*),³³ but there are few other examples that match this family in terms of generational violence. This family violates taboo after taboo, many of which

suggesting that Roman tragedy is most (or only) worth viewing when we don’t have a ‘better’ Greek version to stage.

33 As mentioned above, it is slightly surprising that these two plays have not received the sort of more popular attention *Thyestes* has, given the level of recent critical attention paid to both. They are certainly hampered by the existence of two popular Greek originals by Euripides, but I suspect that the lack of translations of both of these plays also plays a role: they are not nearly as widely available as *Thyestes* is, for example.

also connect to some particularly modern, western concerns about consumption, concerns which are most obviously on view in NBC's *Hannibal*, with its gorgeous, beautifully shot cannibalistic feasts.³⁴ The current cultural interest in zombies also indirectly reflects our own concerns with modern (and, it must be said, less cannibalistic) consumption. The modern zombie owes its roots to George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), in which the cannibalistic zombies can be seen as the ultimate late capitalist consumers mindlessly besieging a shopping mall.³⁵ *Shaun of the Dead* (2004) adapted this trope for humor and its heroes take a considerable time to recognize that the zombies are zombies, and not just regular commuters and workers deadened by a modern life stumbling along their daily routine.

3 The Future of Senecan Reception

From these general trends, is there anything that can be said about the directions in which Senecan reception might tend? Of course, anyone who tries to foretell the future is inevitably doomed to be proven wrong, and often very quickly. Knowing that, rather than trying to attempt the impossible, what I would like to do in the concluding section of this paper is to draw together some of the threads that I see in current modes of Senecan scholarship and reception, to connect them with overall trends in popular culture, and to suggest some ways that his reception may develop or, perhaps, be influenced to develop.

4 Violence, Ancient and Modern

First, I return to the issue of violence in entertainment raised in the opening section of this paper. I do not believe Senecan dramatic violence can be isolated from other forms of violent entertainment popular in the early empire,

34 Of course, part of the horror is that those Hannibal Lector has invited to dine have no idea they are feasting on various human parts—just as Thyestes has no idea that he is eating his own children. In both consumption of human flesh is also a commentary on other forms of problematic consumption and attitudes towards eating and drinking: it's not enough that Thyestes eat his children, he does so while drunk, his hair dripping various unguents (778–80), and singing (919–20) in his alcoholic stupor.

35 Wood 1979 is a good and influential introduction (it has since been reprinted a number of times); a great deal has been written on this topic in the entire series since then.

entertainment we know he was very familiar with and attended, even if only to despise it and its effects on the audience.³⁶ In an age of especially graphic and violent staging in the Roman arena and on stage, including an Icarus flight that went wrong, resulting in Nero being splashed with blood, and, apparently, a staging of Pasiphaë mating with the bull,³⁷ Seneca's level of graphic and detailed violence reflects more than a literary development. It reflects the concerns of a society where fictional and real violence were often on view as part of entertainment supplied by the state. We can wring our hands over the Roman taste in both high and low culture for graphic and sometimes real violence, or we can more fruitfully consider it a result of a number of complex issues, some of which might have to do with the nature of entertainment itself to compete in its various forms and the tendency for cross-contamination between popular and literary culture. In this area, discussion has already begun about the influence of pantomime on the choruses of Seneca (cf. Slaney 2013 in particular); more could be done on the influence of emerging, popular presentations of violence on stage and in the arena. We are lucky (if it makes sense to use such a term in this context) in that we inhabit a time in which violence is part and parcel of mainstream, popular, *mass*³⁸ modern entertainment on an unparalleled scale. This may allow us a unique moment in modern Senecan studies to explore the violence of the dramas in a cultural and media environment saturated with it.

The modern rise of cinematic violence of all forms in an unusually wide range of movie genres has less to do with a regrettable lack of taste on the part of modern viewers and more to do with the values of ratings systems like the MPAA, where graphic violence results in a movie receiving a PG-13 rating,³⁹ whereas sex or swearing generally garners an automatic R. For example,

36 The *locus classicus* for this in Seneca's writings is *Epistle* 7 which describes in graphic detail both what is happening on the arena floor and audience's reactions to it; references to gladiatorial games are common throughout Seneca's writings, and, in fact, give us some of our best evidence about otherwise obscure items, such as gladiatorial programs (cf. *Epistle* 117.30).

37 Suetonius, *Nero* 11–12. The next dynasty, the Flavians, upped the level of violence, considerably, and restaged the Pasiphaë event as a method of execution (Martial, *Book of Spectacles* 5). The classic work on such executions is Coleman 1990.

38 Of course, ancient and medieval spectacles often involved a high level of cruelty, and public executions were common in European countries until the nineteenth century. But the sheer reach of modern media and its ability to replay the same event over and over is unparalleled.

39 PG-13 ratings are desirable over R ratings as they increase the potential market for a movie and allow it to be sold as 'family friendly.'

in 2013 *Philomena*, a movie about a woman searching for the son taken from her at birth, received an R from the MPAA because it had the temerity to use the F-word twice, while *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012) was given a PG-13 rating, despite killing an enormous number of people in often quite brutal ways. The relative ease with which violent scenes can appear even in family movies means that current PG-13 movies have now roughly the same amount of violence that R rated movies used to have (Bushman *et al.* 2013).⁴⁰ On TV, subscriber-based channels like HBO are not bound by the same rules as network television channels, they are allowed to show a high level of nudity and violence (compare, for example, *Game of Thrones* with anything you can see on the BBC in the UK or NBC or AMC in the US, even in envelop-pushing dramas, and HBO's freedom is clear).

Naturally, movies that are willing to accept an R rating can embrace violence wholeheartedly: splatters of blood reaching out to the viewer in stylized slow-motion were lovingly depicted in *300* (2006) and in a less commercially successful iteration in *Dredd* (2012); *300*'s enthusiastic ballet of gore was repeated in its sequel, *Rise of an Empire* (2014), a film with impressive visuals and no screenplay to speak of. All this is emphasized by the use of 3D, where spewing blood reaches out to the viewer on a regular basis. *300*, *Rise of an Empire*, *Dredd* were not horror movies, traditionally the place where viewers are treated to graphic violence; they were and are action movies first and foremost, showing the dissipation of traditional genre lines with regard to the showing of certain forms of violence. This is not purely an American phenomenon, as Korean and Japanese gangster and horror movies too push the envelope of what can be represented on screen. Good examples of such elements in Korean cinema include *Oldboy* (2003),⁴¹ *Lady Vengeance* (2005), *A Dirty Carnival* (2006), and *I Saw the Devil* (2010). Japanese horror movies also have their own fair share of graphic and violent horror: see, for example, *Audition* (1999) and *Grotesque* (2006).⁴²

40 The situation is not unique to the US: a scanning of the ratings systems of many countries shows similar tendencies. It is nearly always easier to show violence on screen than sexual activity.

41 Remade for the English speaking market in 2013: it was neither a commercial nor a critical hit.

42 However, one of the most famous examples of Japanese horror in the West, *Ring* (1998) was celebrated by Western critics for the suggestive rather than graphic or violent nature of its horror, which was taken erroneously as typical of Japanese horror (Martin 2009, 39–40).

The effect has spread to other media. Young Adult cinema and fiction also employs successfully and openly uses violence as part of its narrative structure, and often to great critical acclaim. Suzanne Collins's immensely successful three volume series *The Hunger Games*⁴³ takes place in the dystopian world of Panem, where the wealthy Capitol feasts yearly on the televised spectacle of children sent as tributes from twelve districts killing each other. The amount of children who die in graphic ways over the course of the three novels is remarkable for an extremely popular series (the pace quickens in the last 100 pages, where likeable characters get slaughtered in gruesome ways almost every 1,000 words). The violence in the book series was toned down for cinema to obtain a PG-13 rating in the US, with extra seconds also edited to receive a 12A rating for the first movie in the UK.

I want to switch gears to discuss another element of modern media consumption that also matches one of the critical elements of Senecan tragedy (and, obviously, Roman literature in general): intertextuality. Senecan drama is nothing if not intertextual, building on Greek and earlier Roman tragedy, as well as other Greco-Roman genres. Many of the tragedies Seneca tackled had multiple Greek *and* Roman versions: Ennius, Accius, and Ovid had previously written well-regarded Latin versions of the *Medea*, for example,⁴⁴ and Accius's tragedy *Atreus* clearly affected Seneca in his conceptualization of his *Atreus* and in his understanding of tyrannical behavior, as the most famous line from Accius's play, *oderint, dum metuant* ("let them hate, as long they fear"), is used several times in Seneca's prose writings.⁴⁵ But an argument for the clearly intertextual nature of Seneca's tragedies is neither necessary nor original; I raise it primarily because it is clear that we now are experiencing a great age of

43 *The Hunger Games* (2008), *Catching Fire* (2009), and *Mockingjay* (2010). The film series split the last novel into two movies and thus consists of four movies: *The Hunger Games* (2012); *Catching Fire* (2013); *Mockingjay—Part I* (2014); *Mockingjay—Part II* (2015).

44 Ennius (239–169 BCE); Accius (170–c. 86 BCE); Ovid 43 BCE–17/18 CE; all three tragedies are now almost entirely lost, though they were popular in their own period: Gaius Gracchus used to quote from Ennius's *Medea Exul* (Cicero, *On the Orator* 3.217) and Quintilian declared Ovid's *Medea* one of the finest things he had written (*Institutes of Oratory* 10.1.98; see also Tacitus *Dialogue on Oratory* 12).

45 *On Anger* 1.20.4; *On Clemency* 1.12.4 and 2.2.2; Schiesaro 1992 is a good introduction to Virgil and intertextuality in the *Thyestes* in particular: he notes that "intertextuality becomes an internal, ambiguous mode of defense for arguably inconceivable monstrosities" (63); for a fuller discussion of the *Thyestes* see Schiesaro 2003. In the post apocalyptic comic series *Lazarus* (2014–), *Atreus's* line is also the motto of one of the great families that rules over a world of serfs and what is charmingly called 'waste'—those without an allegiance to one of these families.

popular 'participatory culture,' which has at its core an intertextual approach to media.⁴⁶

Creative reworkings and adaptations of popular culture "have become increasingly central to how contemporary popular culture operates" (Jenkins 2003, 282). Of course, participatory culture has always been a mode of relating to texts and other media, but the barriers to expressing that participation have dropped in an age of cheap video technology and easy access to online and e-publishing. Sampling and remixing of a range of source materials (what is called intertextuality when discussing classical literary works) is one of the predominant modes of internet culture, which is to say much of modern popular culture, and is also prevalent in a range of musical genres from rap to hip-hop. Rewriting and adding to existing texts, no matter how mundane they are, is commonplace. Even the humble Cambridge Latin Course has fanfiction, which, as a genre, is *de facto* an intertextual and transformative approach to writing. After all, it cannot exist without a source. Some fanfiction may attempt to replicate the original in style and subject matter, and some may transform it, as *Fifty Shades of Grey* (2011) did with *Twilight* (2005). Intertextuality is woven into the foundation of many genres that might be classified under the umbrella rubric of violent entertainment. This is not a recent phenomenon: *Once upon a Time in the West* (1968) was attacked when first released for being too derivative, because of its extensive quotations from earlier Westerns (Hansen-Miller 2011, 103). This went beyond mere echoes of particular movies, and into the art and image of the 'true' West, such as the nineteenth-century photography of Matthew Brady" (ibid., 105). It did so to critique earlier previous Westerns as "foolishly sincere" (ibid., 111), by placing such echoes in the middle of a film that lacks any traditional Western hero or heroine.

We need to rethink intertextuality and its popular appeal in light of these contemporary popular modes of adaption, restyling, and appropriation (Allen 2011, 205) and we need to rethink what possibilities this may present for an author like Seneca. What can the ability of an average audience member to recall a complex network of scenes imitated in one movie after another, and the pleasure some get from hunting down or reading about every reference of this sort, tell us about the popular appeal of intertextual references for wider audiences, even in ancient societies such as Rome? Of course, we are helped now by recording devices that allow us to watch shows and movies repeatedly, but it is worth noting that some highly intertextual movies (such as *Once upon a Time in the West*) predate such technology and that many intertextual

46 The term was coined by Henry Jenkins in his 1992 work *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*; a good introduction is Delwiche and Henderson 2006.

quotes in media do not require more than a general familiarity with the source. Intertextuality in either a modern or an ancient tradition does not necessarily mean that one has to be thoroughly familiar with all parts of a source: a good example of this is *The Matrix*'s (1999) 'bullet time,'⁴⁷ an effect which is much imitated and parodied, and relies only on a very basic memory of the original source to work. Roman audiences, of course, trained their memories much more than we do now, and some intertextual references (like Accius's line *oderint, dum metuant*) were easily recognizable without an intense familiarity with the original. It is also worth noting that we have a much, much larger and more developed media and entertainment market than ancient Rome, with an enormous choice of entertainment options in all media, which makes some artificial aids to memory more necessary.

Modern audiences are also familiar with complex mythological structures and story elements sprawling over a number of different, but connected, stories. Blockbuster movies, which are part of 'entertainment supersystems,'⁴⁸ where a deliberate network of intertextual references across a range of media (movies, games, book tie-ins, action figures, etc.) is employed to increase spectator engagement with and, hence, monetary investment in, all works produced within a franchise, are common and very profitable. The various *Avengers*, *Iron Man*, *Thor*, *Captain America*, and now *Antman* movies and the *Marvel: Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* and *Agent Carter* TV shows are all part of the same universe. No single person who could grasp all the various strands of these various incarnations of the same Marvel franchise would blench before the complexities of Greek or Roman mythology.

5 What Has This to Do with Senecan Reception?

What might this mean for Senecan reception? It means that the gore and graphic descriptions of violence that scholars were traditionally uncomfortable with in his dramas have become normalized in terms of audience expectations and can be critically applauded, explored, and maybe even expanded. This, as much as anything, may explain why *all* the recent dramatic productions of Seneca I listed above manage to be more violent and graphic than

47 Where bullets slow down on screen or slow motion is used to slow down parts of the action on screen; in a very modern move, 'bullet time' is a registered trademark of Warner Bros.

48 Sometimes termed 'transmedia intertextuality'; both phrases coined by Marsha Kinder (1991, 122–23).

their source texts. The same is true for one adaptation of Seneca I have not discussed so far, Sarah Kane's *Phaedra in Love*.⁴⁹ Originally staged by the Gate Theatre in London in 1996, it has been revived a number of times: in Houston (2002),⁵⁰ Berlin (1999 and 2003, for Schauspiel Bonn and Thomas Ostermeier's Deutsche Theater Baracke, respectively); Bristol (2005, Old Vic); and London (2011, Arcola Theatre). Kane made massive changes to the original, all of which make her version much more graphic: far from being an obsessively chaste hunter, Hippolytus's first act on stage is to masturbate into a (clean!) sock; Phaedra later fellates him as he lies there bored, rather than offended. As if that were not enough, at the end we have the onstage rape and murder of Strophe, Phaedra's daughter and Theseus's stepdaughter, invented by Kane for this version; Theseus's onstage suicide; and Hippolytus's genitals being torn off and thrown to dogs.

Kane herself admitted to limited influence from the original, which she claimed to have read only once; she was particularly resistant to relying too much on a classical original where she believed (more or less correctly) that all the violence took place off-stage.⁵¹ The desire not to be limited by a (supposedly) bloodless original is telling, and I suspect that the goriest of Seneca's tragedies will be the ones that continue to receive the most attention in the coming years. It makes some sense for those to be plays like *Thyestes* that connect with themes in modern violent shows and media: cannibalism, consumption, revenge, and the endless shedding of blood in new and aesthetically intriguing ways.⁵²

It also means, I believe, that we are facing audiences that are far more familiar with some of the modes of Senecan expression than those of a previous generation. I do not mean that audiences are familiar with Senecan tragedy, but, rather, that there is a cultural convergence of sensibility. We are facing audiences who have no trouble keeping track of a number of different stories inhabiting the same universe, who understand and practice both intertextuality and creative rewriting of a massive range of source material.

49 On *Phaedra's Love* and its influences and initial reception see Marshall 2011.

50 Infernal Bridegroom Productions for Axiom Theatre.

51 Given the graphicness of Seneca's messenger speeches one does wonder how much the viewer's experience of violence was lessened by being described rather than shown, especially, as I note above, as the death of Hippolytus seems likely to be modeled on real chariot crashes in the Circus Maximus and elsewhere.

52 That is also true for some critical studies: Paul Hammond's *The Strangeness of Tragedy* only deals with one Senecan play, *Thyestes*; Timothy Moore's *Roman Theatre* (2012) uses Seneca's *Thyestes* as a way into his discussion of Senecan tragedy and concentrates on that play.

6 Intervening in the Future of Senecan Reception

If we as academics want to see Seneca's tragedies gain a stronger foothold outside academia—and, as I have argued above, I believe his modes of writing and themes make him an author that could easily appeal to current audiences—then this is something within our grasp. The opening of scholarship to those with little or no Latin is a good start, as is the creation of companion volumes like this, which allow beginners to the topic to see a range of views and present an author or topic in a complex and multifaceted light. But more could be done, including a serious academic engagement by Senecan scholars with the internet, where Senecan tragedy is very poorly represented, outside of out-of-date translations and scanty Wikipedia entries. It is regrettable that the first entry that Google retrieves if you search for Senecan tragedy in most languages is his Wikipedia entry, which is not adequate in any European version. For example, the French entry for Seneca the Younger barely mentions the tragedies, while the English entry for his tragedies is a slightly reworked version of his entry in the 1911 *Encyclopedia Britannica*. We have an opportunity to affect popular culture as never before, as the barriers have dropped for entry into the debate; other groups have moved to ensure that, for example, Wikipedia better reflects their discipline; the Royal Society and the Royal Academy of Engineers recently urged members to contribute entries on female scientists so that they are not written out of history. We might take our lead from their actions: imagine a class project to translate a Senecan play and release the translation free of copyright on the web; or a crowd sourced translation, fit for the modern age, that would be available to all who searched online. We might also promote virtual reconstructions of Senecan tragedies on stage that would show him as a performable author, not as a textual artifact; images of costumes for Roman tragedy; a central repository for work about Seneca's tragedies and their reception.⁵³ Such projects would make Senecan drama more accessible, immediate, and coherent, as opposed to the fractured and sparse landscape we now see.

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53 The *Oxford Bibliographies Online* are a valuable resource, but require expensive subscriptions.

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